

## **A COLLECTION OF SERBIAN MARTYRS, vol. 2**

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### **---Apolytikon, Tone I---**

“The scarlet of thy blood, shed for Christ's sake, O Martyrs, / doth adorn the Church as fine linen and purple, / the crimson seed of the Faith is sown with generous hand, / the flowing of the river make glad God's Kingdom, / and her enemies are thereby drowned in confusion, // O Serbia, rejoice with joy!”

### **---Kontakion, Tone IV---**

“Like a firmament of stars / brilliant with glory / did these Holy Martyrs shine / amidst a nation most wicked / let us beseech them with fervour / that they preserve in Orthodox piety!”

From “Orthodox Life”, Vol 33, No. 1, (Jan-Feb 1983), pg. 23, written by Joachim Wertz:

“The new Serbian martyrs of World War II included five bishops and at least 177 other clergy martyrs. In all, both clergy and lay, they number about 750,000. The late Bishop (St.) Nikolai (Velimirovich), over a quarter of a century ago, inscribed into the Church calendar by his own hand the following notation for the date August 31th (O. S.): “The 700,000 who suffered for the Orthodox faith at the hands of the Roman crusaders and Ustashe during the time of the Second World War. These are the New Serbian Martyrs.”

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Most dates below are on the New Style, for both ease of the readers coming from Western backgrounds, and to make it easier for those who wish to do their own research. The only dates that are on the Patristic Calendar of the Church will be listed explicitly. For any commemoration of the Church date, it will be 13 days behind the listed date.

### **---HISTORICAL CONTEXT---**

On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1941 the “Axis Powers”, a combined German, Italian, Hungarian and Bulgarian Army invaded Yugoslavia after a failed coup d'etat was launched by Prince Paul against King Peter II for the throne. On April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the invasion of Yugoslavia was complete, with an armistice being signed, and the “Independent State of Croatia”, or “NDH” (Nezavisna Drzhava Hrvatska) with its fascist ruling party, the “Ustashe”, being put in power over all of Croatia, Bosnia, and a majority of Serbian lands, Germany occupied Banat, Hungary occupied Vojvodina, and the Italians occupied Montenegro and Dalmatia. The Ustashe soon declared the Serbian people to be “enemies of the state”, and Serbs were not allowed to use the same public transport as Croats, and were forbade to work in certain job sectors.

The Ustashe had existed since before the war, and were responsible for the assassination of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia in 1934. They were blessed by Pope Pius XII even before the war, as in 1939 he gave his “warmest blessing” to them in a speech, and described the Croatian nationalist party as being “the outpost of Christianity”, of whom, “a better future rests upon.”

Multiple Serbian Bishops, including Patriarch Gavrilo V, Bishop (St.) Nikolaj Velimirovich and Bishop Irenej of Dalmatia were arrested early in the occupation of Yugoslavia by German authorities and Italian authorities. His Holiness Gavrilo and Vladyka Nikolaj were captured at the Ostrog Monastery, and brought to the Dachau prison camp in Germany. Vladyka Irenej (Djordjevich) was brought from Dalmatia to a prison camp in Italy. The exile and imprisonment of these Hierarchs inadvertently saved their lives.

The official Roman Catholic newsletter of the Sarajevo diocese published in the days following the invasion stated: “Until now, God spoke to us through Papal encyclicals... And they (the Serbs) didn't listen... Now the commandments of God will not be taught by priests, but by army officers. Our sermons will be taught by cannons, machine guns, tanks and bombers...”

The Vatican gave stately recognition of the NDH shortly after its creation, during a visit Ante Pavelich made to the Vatican where he had a “devotional audience” with Pope Pius XII. Any and all reports of brutality and genocide were ignored by the Vatican, as Nikola Rusinovich, an official NDH ambassador to the Vatican, wrote secretly to Pavelich after a meeting with cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini that the Vatican “...disregards any negative information about the NDH...”

On April 25<sup>th</sup>, the Ustashe passed a law prohibiting usage of the Cyrillic alphabet –

created by Sts. Cyril and Methodius – under threat of death. On April 30th, a law was passed that required Orthodox Christians to wear blue armbands with a “P” (being short for Pravoslavac, the Croatian word for Orthodox). On May 5<sup>th</sup> 1941, the NDH passed a law which outlawed the Serbian Orthodox Church. In 1942, the NDH would create the so called “Croatian Orthodox Church”, a schismatic entity led by the deposed ROCOR Bishop, Germogen, in order to create more chaos for Orthodox Christians in Serbia.

The complicity of the Roman Catholic church in the NDH's genocide is undeniable, as one of the main architects of this genocide against Serbian Orthodox Christians was the Monsignor Archbishop of the Roman Catholic diocese of Zagreb, by the name of Aloysius Stepinach (who has since been beatified by John Paul II and canonized by Francis), advocated for, and directly participated in the genocide against the Serbian people, as he wrote the Serbs were “schismatics”, and were a “...greater evil than the Protestants...” Stepinach assured Pavelich that he would “not show tolerance” to the Orthodox Church, and praised Pavelich as a “sincere Catholic.”

Patriarch Gavrilo V of Serbia and Patriarch Benjamin I of Constantinople sent letters to Pope Pius XII, asking him to intervene and stop the Ustashe's genocide – to which there was neither a response nor action from the Pope. In fact, the only Catholic priest to protest against the genocide of Serbs in the Vatican, Eugene Tisserant, was treated contemptuously and considered untrustworthy by his bishops and fellow priests. Tisserant wrote:

“I know, for a fact, that Franciscans themselves, such as father Simich of Knin, have taken part in attacks against the Orthodox population so as to destroy the Orthodox Church. In the same way, you destroyed the Orthodox Church in Banja Luka. I know without a doubt that the Franciscan order in Bosnia and Herzegovina have acted abominably, and this pains me. Such acts should not be committed by educated, cultured or civilized people, let alone priests.”

The historian John Cornwell also points out the notable role of the Franciscan order during the genocide in his work, “Hitler's Pope: The Secret history of Pius XII” (pub. Viking, London, 1999), writing the following:

“(Roman Catholic) priests, invariably Franciscans, took a leading part of the massacres. Many, went around routinely armed and performed their murderous acts with zeal. A father Bozidar Bralow, was well known for the machine gun that

was his constant companion, and was accused of performing a dance around the bodies of 180 massacred Serbs at Alipisan-Most. Individual Franciscans, killed, set fire to homes, sacked villages, and laid waste to the Bosnian countryside, often leading Ustashe bands. In September 1941, an Italian reporter wrote of a Franciscan he had witnessed south of Banja Luka urging on a band of Ustashe with his crucifix.”

Another quote, highlighting the pivotal role the Franciscans played in the genocide, comes from a Franciscan priest writing to the Ustashe commander of the village of Derventa: “There are 500 Serbian widows in five villages who could be married to Catholics, for there are no more Serbian Orthodox. This would be an opportune chance to indoctrinate them, and in turn they may indoctrinate their families with Catholicism and Croatianism.”

Ante Pavelich, who lived in Italy before the invasion, and was appointed by the Italians as the poglavnik (dictator) of the NDH, declared Serbs to be “state property... like cattle”. A slogan used by the Ustashe coined by Pavelich directed towards Serbs was: “Either cross the Drina or go beyond the Drina.” Bodies with signs saying “For Belgrade and King Peter” or bodies of children with signs saying “for the Belgrade market” would drift down the Drina almost daily at the height of the genocide.

A common weapon used by the Ustashe was an agricultural sheaf knife, originally used for cutting wheat, that would be used to quickly slit the throats of Serbs. The Ustashe even gave a nickname for the tool, the “Srbosjek” (Serb slicer). Often times the Ustashe would host competitions to see how fast they could kill a certain number of Serbs.

Pavelich was praised by Pope Pius XII for “spreading the true faith” to “schismatics.” He even said that for the crimes of the Ustashe that the “war would write off all sins” and that “the victors shall not be judged.” Pavelich stated there was freedom of religion in the NDH but “not for the Orthodox.” In 1943, on the (Roman Catholic) New Year's day, January 1<sup>st</sup>, Pope Pius XII gave his blessing to Pavelich, saying:

“Everything that you have so warmly expressed in your name and in the name of Croatian Catholics we return gracefully and give you and the whole Croatian people our apostolic blessing.”

Often Muslims would participate in such crimes, the Ustashe had entire divisions of their military made up exclusively of Muslims, the German Waffen-SS created a volunteer unit, the 13<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, better known as the “Handschar” or “1<sup>st</sup> Croatian” unit. The unit was entirely made up of Bosniak Muslims, and was well known for their brutality.

Prominent Bosniak Muslims, including the mayor of Sarajevo, Mustafa Softich, wrote a letter to Adolf Hitler in 1942 (which can be found in Vladimir Dedijer's book “Genocide against Muslims 1942-1945”) stating that the Bosniaks were “Illyrians and Goths” and that Serbs were “subhumans” that needed to be “exterminated”. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, also blessed the German and Ustashe armies, and personally called the extermination of Serbs a “jihad” (struggle) and a “fard” (duty).

The plan of the NDH was to convert a third of the Serbs to Papism, deport another third, and murder the last third; as was announced in a speech by Pavelich and Mile Budak on June 22<sup>th</sup>, 1941, with the exact words: “We will kill one part of the Serbs, the other part will be deported, and the remaining ones we will convert to the Catholic faith, and thus make them Croats.” The words at the end of the speech were: “We shall destroy every trace of them, and all that will be left is a bad memory. For every Serb, Jew and Gypsy, we have three millions bullets for all of them!” This speech was reprinted in the official Roman Catholic journal of Zagreb, “Katolicki List.”

Immediately after this speech, Aloysius Stepinach welcomed “the new law” and described the Serbs as “renegades from the Catholic Church.” On July 31<sup>st</sup> of 1941, the NDH declared there needed to be an acceleration on the conversion of the Serbs. However, a majority of Serbs refused to convert to Papism. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941, Stepinach wrote to Prince Paul of Yugoslavia stating:

“The way for the Serbs to save themselves is to return to the faith of our fathers... That is, to bow down before Christ's representative, the Pope. Then we could breathe well in this part of Europe. For the Byzantines (the Orthodox) have been an unfortunate part of our history.”

On the forced conversions, a Papist priest by the name of Dionizije Juricevich wrote about the process at the village of Staza: “We are well aware those who reject (our) baptism will be killed. I have already 'cleansed' the southern lands, from infants to elders. And I am ready to do the same here, if necessary, because

there is no sin in killing a seven year old child, if he is impeding the progress of the Ustashe... Disregard my priestly vestments. Know if needed, I will take a submachine gun and destroy all who resist the Ustashe.”

Aloysius Stepinach oversaw the committee that was to convert the Serbs, and was given the title of “Supreme Military Apostolic Vicar of the Ustashe Army” by the NDH. Pope Pius XII sent a letter personally addressed to Stepinach and multiple priests who participated in such massacres, thanking them in their efforts to convert the “schismatics.” Stepinach claimed 200,000 Serbs were forcibly converted to Papism, sometimes by being dragged to Papist churches and given “baptism.”

It is worth noting that a majority of these Serbs who accepted Catholicism and survived the war, returned to Orthodoxy. However, a lot of Serbian children were taken away by their parents or were orphaned by the Ustashe, and thus raised as Papists and Croats. Sadly many of them grew up as Catholic Croats, not knowing their true identity or faith.

Stepinach wrote in his diary on August 3<sup>rd</sup> of 1941: “God, who directs the destiny of nations and controls the hearts of Kings, has given us Ante Pavelich and moved the heart of our friendly and allied people, Adolf Hitler, to use his victorious warriors to disperse our enemies... Glory be to God, our gratitude is to Adolf Hitler, and our loyalty to our poglavnik, Ante Pavelich!”

According to the historian Vladimar Dedijer: “Throughout the whole war, in more than 150 newspapers and magazines, the Catholic church justified the NDH under Pavelich and its massacres as the works of God.”

The efforts of the Ustashe did not go unopposed, as many soldiers of the Royal Yugoslav Army would join the Chetniks, who fought a guerrilla campaign against the Ustashe, and who were supported by King Peter II, who had fled to Britain. The Chetniks were supported by the United States and British governments until 1943, when Soviet intelligence agents had claimed they collaborated with the Nazis. The betrayal by the United States and Britain had essentially doomed Yugoslavia to fall to Communism in 1944.

Often the Ustashe used language and symbolism that they were “Crusaders” (Krizar), which was the name of a youth organization, which Pavelich described as “...(being) raised in the spirit of radical Catholicism, which knows no compromise

as far as principles are concerned, and never knew what it meant to give in or abandon any part of the program of Croatian nationalism.” Many members of the Krizar organization, such as Vjekoslav Luburich, ordered and participated in many killings.

It was also common that Roman Catholic clergy and monastics would participate in such crimes directly, as in the case of the Stara Gradishka concentration camp – a camp for women and children -- where over 12,000 people lost their lives, was run by Roman Catholic nuns. At the end of the war, it was estimated that at least 1,400 Roman Catholic priests had directly participated in the genocide. This number is considered by modern analysis to only be about two thirds of the true number of Papist priests who participated in the genocide.

Even the Germans – themselves known for brutality against the Serbs during WW2, who had a policy that for every one German soldier killed, a hundred Serbian civilians would be shot, and were responsible for such massacres like those at Panchevo, Sanski Most, Ivanci and Kragujevac – were horrified by the brutality of the Ustashe, and often German officers would try to intervene and stop killings. A German officer wrote in June 1941, forwarding reports from his men to the German general over Yugoslavia, Hermann Reinecke: “The Ustashe have gone raging mad.”

Many Serbs were saved thanks to the efforts of Bishop Dionisije (Milivojevic) of America and Canada, who helped obtain visas for hundreds of Serbs who were held in German and Italian concentration camps. Vladyka Dionisije would help St. Nikolaj Velimirovich come to the United States after the war, and he would later excommunicate the Communist backed Patriarch, Germann, and organize the Free Serbian Orthodox Church.

Ante Pavelich himself was housed in the Vatican after the war, along with 500 other Ustashe war criminals, and he was considered a devout Catholic, going to Mass every day. He considered himself a “staunch defender” for Catholicism, and an opponent of Orthodoxy. He called upon his comrades to be ruthless saying: “We have no need to be humane.” Aloysius Stepinach was made a cardinal after the war, and the Vatican and Italian Papist sympathizers had established a “rat line” for Ustashe war criminals to flee justice.

Serbs in Montenegro and Dalmatia were able to avoid persecution from the Papist Italians thanks to the intervention of the Queen of Italy, Elena, who was a Serb

from Montenegro. The Bulgarians also acted charitably towards the Serbs, as they were both Orthodox. A majority of massacres were committed by the Ustashe, Papist Hungarians, or the Nazis.

Between the Axis forces, Ustashe and Communists, over 900,000 Yugoslav citizens, including 750,000 Serbs, were murdered, 300,000 Serbs left their homes in their ancestral homelands, many of which perished on the journey, and 200,000 Serbs were forcibly converted to Papism during the Second World War. Among those killed were six Bishops (four by the Ustashe, one by the Communists, and one by the Nazis), 217 clergy killed, an additional 335 clergy had to flee. Over 300 Churches were destroyed. In Karlovac, 173 out of the 189 temples were destroyed. Many others were converted into stables, latrines, or given the Roman Catholics.

The destruction and murder of so many clergy by the Ustashe, Nazis and Papists, along with the persecution by the Communists after the war left the Serbian Church in shambles, and unfortunately paved the way for the takeover of the Church by the Communists in 1962 with the election of Germann as Patriarch.

Sadly, today, many in Croatia glorify the Ustashe and their crimes, and consider them “heroes” for Croatian nationalism.

### **---ARCHIMANDRITE SIMEON POPOVICH---**

Sava Popovich was born on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1854, in the Donji Krai region of Cetinije in Montenegro, as a member of the important Popovich clan. His parents divorced when he was still an infant, and his father reposed shortly thereafter. His mother remarried and moved to Skadar, and did not wish to raise her own son, so thus he was raised by relatives of his father. He was quite close to his uncle, who was a priest, Fr. Lazar.

He was schooled in the Cetinije monastery with the ability to read and write, and shortly after finishing his education, he participated in the Montenegrin-Turkish war of 1876-1878. In 1879, Sava went to the Kyiv Theological Seminary (which had been founded by St. Petro Mohyla) to study theology. Having wanderlust, he wished to experience Western Europe, despite the Fathers of the Kyiv monastery warning against it. He traveled to France, and studied in a university in Paris, then he went to Switzerland, and studied in a university in Geneva.

He was very disappointed by the secularism of Western Europe, and returned to



Russia, where in 1887, he became a monk at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, and was tonsured with the name Simeon, after St. Simeon Nemanja. Very shortly after his tonsure, he was ordained a Hierodeacon, and briefly served as an Archdeacon. He was later ordained a Hieromonk.

In 1888, he returned to Montenegro and entered the Vrajina monastery, where he stayed for two years until he moved to Ostrog Monastery – which was founded by St. Basil of Ostrog. For the next eight years, Fr. Simeon labored in the Ostrog monastery. One day, a shepherd came to visit Fr. Simeon, and stated that he had a vision on the way there, of a man in vestments standing in a cave – near the village of Dajbabe – which was an ancient Church that had since been forgotten, and that he needed to tell the Fathers of the Ostrog monastery it should be rededicated and restored into a monastery.

Fr. Simeon went to Dajbabe and found the cave the shepherd saw. He restored it and named the Church after the Dormition of the Mother of God, and turned the rocky caves of Dajbabe into a monastery. The first monk Fr. Simeon tonsured was the shepherd who had the vision, and Fr. Simeon became the first Abbot in 1898.

While in asceticism, Fr. Simeon obtained many spiritual gifts, such as clairvoyance, discernment, and healing. He often prophesied about the upcoming struggles of the Serbian people, and warned of a far worse persecution than that of the Turks. In 1921, the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church unanimously chose Fr. Simeon to become a Bishop, and give him the seat of the Eparchy of Zahumije and Rashka. Fr. Simeon both refused in writing, and hid from the people sent from the Synod to look for him.

Fr. Simeon saw the coming of the Ustashe, and prayed that he would not see it. In many of his sermons he told people to prepare for Martyrdom. On the early morning of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1941, Fr. Simeon Popovich reposed – just five days before the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia. At his funeral, Bishop (St.) Nikolaj Velimirovich gave a eulogy calling him a Holy Monk. Fr. (St.) Justin Popovich, who was a kinsman of Fr. Simeon, wrote that he was “...dignified by the sweet grace of the great Serbian Elder, Father Simeon.” Three years after his repose, Metropolitan (St.) Joannikije – who was martyred by the Communists – delivered a sermon calling him a Saint.

While he isn't a New Martyr, his prophecies about the upcoming Martyrdom of thousands, and his advice to prepare for Martyrdom, perhaps saved thousands of

Serbian and allowed them to receive these crowns of Martyrdom for themselves. His relics were buried at Dajbabe monastery, and exude myrrh. Many miracles have happened at his grave. His memory is kept on April 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **---ST. PLATON OF BANJA LUKA---**

Milivoje Jovanovich was born in Belgrade, on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1874, to the parents Ilia and Jelka (whose maiden name was Sokolovich, from Focha), both of whom were from Herzegovina. He was schooled in Vranje and later in Nish, and as a young adult he entered seminary in Belgrade. In his third semester, he took on monastic vows and was tonsured with the name Platon; the following year, he completed seminary, and was ordained to the Diaconate then the Priesthood.

In 1896, he was sent to Russia and served as a priest at the Serbian embassy in Moscow. In 1897, he attended the Moscow Theological Seminary, and became the first Serb to get a state scholarship to study there, and he continued his spiritual education, and graduated with a master's degree in 1901. Shortly thereafter, he returned to Serbia and went to the Rakovica Monastery in Belgrade, and was elected Igumen.

After becoming Abbot of Rakovica, he was raised to the rank of Archpriest, then awarded the rank of Protopope, and eventually Archimandrite. He also taught in the seminary as a professor, and taught in the schools in Aleksinac and Jagodina between the years of 1903-1906. In 1912, he was appointed as a military chaplain, and served as a priest to soldiers during the Balkan Wars. For a short while during the First World War, Archimandrite Platon was a Diocesan administrator for the diocese of Ohrid.

He spent the entirety of the First World War and the Austrian occupation of Serbia in the homeland, and with contacts from Russia and Serbs who had fled to Korfu, he managed to deliver resources and aid to the suffering Serbian people, and ministered in the hospitals and orphanages. He was well known for his care for widows and orphans during the troubled years of the war. In 1918, due to political intrigues of certain Bishops, Archimandrite Platon was uncanonically retired, and had to work as a carpenter to support himself. However within a few months, he became an accountant; however, his enemies accused him of misappropriating funds and he was fired from this position. After a few years, Metropolitan (St.) Dositej wrote a letter to the Synod stating that Fr. Platon had been slandered, and appointed him the Abbot of Poganovo Monastery. In 1932, after the dismissal

of his enemies, he was dismissed of all charges and restored to previous rank.

Between 1932 and 1938, he was the manager of the printing at Sremski Karlovci, where he helped publish the newsletter “Glasnik Srpske Patriashije”, and wrote a newsletter for children, “Milo Bogoljub” starting from 1933 onward. During this time, he was also elected Igumen of the Krusedol Monastery. In 1936, he was elected by the Synod as a vicar Bishop of Moravichi. He was consecrated a Bishop by Patriarch (St.) Varnava of Serbia, Metropolitan Anastasy, who was the First-Hierarch of the ROCOR, Metropolitan (St.) Dositej of Zagreb, Bishop Makariy of Boston (a ROCOR Bishop), and Bishop (St.) Irenej of Bachka in Sremski Karlovci.

In October of 1936, he was given the titular title of Srem Sava (a neighbourhood of Sremski Karlovci). During the Concordat crisis, he wrote a tract titled “Remarks and Objections to the Concordat”. He present as the infamous “Bloody Liturgy” in which an Orthodox Bishop and priest were murdered by gendarmes for resisting the pan-heresy of Ecumenism.

On June 22<sup>th</sup> of 1938, he was elected a ruling Bishop of Ohrid and Bitolj. He discovered soon after his appointment, that most of the priests of his diocese were bickering and quarreling with each other. Despite Vladyka Platon's attempts to reconcile the groups, they soon turned on him and protested his appointment, and tried to appeal to the Synod for him to be retired.

On December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1939, he was transferred to the seat of Banja Luka, and would stay there until his Martyrdom. After the invasion of Yugoslavia, the area of Banja Luka fell under the NDH's territory, on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1941, he assured he would not abandon his flock. However, since he was a Serb born in Serbia, and not a resident of Bosnia, he was issued a deportation notice on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1941 by the officer Viktor Gutich. Vladyka Platon wrote back to the Ustashe:

“The Authorities appointed me the Bishop of Banja Luka lawfully – according to Canon Law; having such a position I took an obligation before God, the Church, and the people, that inseparably binding my life and my soul with the life and the souls of my spiritual flock, to care for my spiritual flock permanently and firmly, regardless of any events, and to stay on the spiritual path all the time of my life as given to me by God, persevering in my staying with the flock as a good shepherd who gives his soul for the sheep...”

On the same day, he asked a Roman Catholic bishop, Jozo Garich, to intervene and ask the military officers to let him stay for two or three more days, so that he might prepare for his travel, he also sent a priest, Fr. Dushan Machkich to visit Gutich, who agreed to postpone the deportation by ten days. Dr. Garich told Bishop Platon to be calm and peaceful. However, the very next day, in the early morning hours of May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1941, six Ustashe militamen, accompanied with a Roman Catholic priest, Dugan Subotich, arrested Bishop Platon and the priest Fr. Dushan Subotich – who was the temporary Diocesan administrator for Bosanaka Gradiska – and after a brief stop at the infamous “Black Prison”, where they took a local Serbian dean of a school also named Dushan, all three men were taken six kilometers away from Banja Luka and brought near the Vrbas river and the village of Vrbanja and murdered.

The Ustashe officer Asim Djelic (who later fled to Italy with help from the Roman Catholic church, and called himself “God's punishment for the Serbs”) committed the deed. The Hieromartyrs Platon and Dushan were found on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1941, near the village of Kumsale. St Platon's relics were scarred and disfigured. He had been murdered with a blunt knife; his eyes, nose and ears had been cut off, his hair and beard had been ripped out, and his chest had been burned.

Two Archpriests and fraternal brothers, Fr. Petar Radjenovich and Fr. Sava Radjenovich, went to visit Viktor Gutich to ask what happened to Bishop Platon, Gutich responded: “What do you want? You have nothing to ask me, nor do I want to answer you. There are no more Serbs, I do not know any Serbs. Get out of here. This is the heart of the state of Croatia, and the heart needs to be cleansed of poison. We've given you enough hospitality here for the 250 years, and we're not giving it to you anymore.”

He was buried in a grave with only a simple wooden Cross with no inscription marking it at a military graveyard in Banja Luka, today the Saint Panteleimon Orthodox cemetery, with no ceremony, after Fr. Dushan Machkich had convinced a group of local Muslims to bury St. Platon. On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1973, his relics were honorably reburied in the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, in Banja Luka, where his relics were placed in a sarcophagus, to the side of the Iconostasis. St. Platon was the first Bishop murdered by the Ustashe. His feast day is on April 22<sup>th</sup>.

There are various accounts of St. Platon's Martyrdom, including one by a resident of Banjolu, a Muslim man by the name Hamdija Afgan, who wrote to a Croatian by the name of Risti Tomich, a local merchant: “Remember Bishop Platon and

Father Subotich, for they were killed by Djelich, Mirko Kovachevich and Niko Chondrich. Mirko and Niko boasted they shot their pistols into them...”

Father Jovo Davidovich wrote: “The Bishop was recognized by a municipal servant, named Ljubo (for I do not know the surname) in the morgue of the hospital in Banja Luka. He could only recognize him by one side of his face, as the other was completely disfigured. He claims that he was naked, save a belt around his waist and shoes on his feet. He was not given an autopsy since that is not allowed by our religion...”

The Doctors Drago Vranjesevich and Djordje Bukinac wrote: “...(we) saw the body of Bishop Platon in the morgue in the State Hospital in Banja Luka. He was wearing socks, shoes and a leather belt around his naked body. The skin on his head had been completely peeled off, revealing his skullcap. A round hole in the skull that had been shot with a 7.92mm rifle was visible – done so at close range – the right side of the face was destroyed, and his chin had been almost cut off.”

Father Dushan Machkich wrote to the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1941: “I found Ljubo Milijevich – a servant of the Funeral Society – and I sent a letter to ask on my behalf of whether or not the body that was found, was of an Orthodox man, and would thus be entrusted to me for a funeral service. Ljubo returned and told me the body was of Bishop Platon, whom he knew well. He said there were three bullet holes in his head. One to the back, one to the temple, and one near the top of the skull. On his feet were shoes, and only a belt around his waist. About half of his beard was removed...”

The site where St. Platon, St. Dushan the Presbyter, and St. Dushan were killed in Vrbanja had a Church built over it, dedicated to St. Platon of Banja Luka. The proto-icon of St. Platon is located at the Krupa Monastery on the bank of the Vrbas river, near Banja Luka.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF GLINA---**

One of the most worst massacres of the Ustashe began on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941, in the region of Glina. The Ustashe first entered a village and killed seven people. In the following days, the Ustashe arrested and murdered 560 more people. On May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1941, a train carrying 120 Serbian deportees stopped in Glina. The train was unloaded by Ustashe and brought into the courtyard of the Jewish marketplace, and a majority were shot or stabbed. The few survivors were taken to one of the

many concentration camps the Ustashe had established.

On the night of May 11<sup>th</sup>, the Ustashe began arresting all Serbs over the age of sixteen – regardless of occupation or class. They took all the Serbs into the local Orthodox Church, and demanded they sign papers declaring their belief in Roman Catholicism. Two men signed and were released. The rest, including Fr. Bogdan Opachich were locked in the Church and it was set on fire. The Ustashe soldiers sat outside and shot anyone attempting to escape.

On May 12<sup>th</sup>, a group of around 100 Serbs were arrested, tied up, and taken to a mass grave near where a Royal Yugoslav Army barracks had been. They were hacked and beaten to death with cleavers, knives, mallets and shovels. The only survivor, Nikica Samardzhija, testified about these events in 1946.

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, another 100 Serbian men were executed near the village of Prekopa. On the night of July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the Ustashe once again showed up in the Glina area, and had demanded all the Serbs convert to Roman Catholicism. Many Serbs showed up to an Orthodox Church, in order to pray that they may be spared. A group of Ustashe militiamen under the command of Vjekoslav Luburich, locked the Serbs in the Church, and they began killing them by hitting them in the head with clubs and the stocks of their rifles. One survivor, Ljubo Jednak, would testify of these events after the war. Around 200 Serbs were killed on that night.

Between the 30<sup>th</sup> of July and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, hundreds of Serbs were killed in the Glina region. By the end of the massacres, which went well into late August of 1941, there were almost no Serbs left in Glina, and around 2,400 had been killed. It was during this massacre, that the practice the Ustashe often employed – of forcing their victims to make the sign of the Cross, and if they did so in the Orthodox manner, they would be murdered – first began. The brutality of these killings even shocked German officers, who witnessed and later wrote about these events. Throughout the months of July and August, pannikhidas are common to see being done in the Orthodox cemeteries for the victims of the massacres.

### **---ST. PETAR OF DABAR-BOSNA---**

Jovan Zimonjich was born in the Grahovo region, on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1866, to the parents Fr. Bogdan Zimonijich, a priest and a participant in the Nevesinjska revolt, and the mother Mara, who was the daughter of a vojvoda. He would attend seminary in Reljevo, near Sarajevo. Between 1883 and 1887, he would continue

his education at the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Cernoviche and spent a year at the University of Vienna in 1892. He graduated and eventually obtained a master's degree in 1893.

In 1894, he was appointed as an assistant professor at Reljevo Seminary, and the following year in 1895, he was appointed a full time professor. On September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1895, he would take monastic vows and be tonsured with the name Petar at the Zhitomirisich monastery. The following day, on September 7<sup>th</sup>, he would be ordained a Deacon, and on September 8<sup>th</sup>, he was ordained a Priest. In 1898, he was made an Archpriest, and in 1899, he was appointed a Protopope by Metropolitan Nikolaj (Mandich, who would later participate in the consecration of Petar as Bishop).

In 1901, he became the father confessor and spiritual father in a Church in Sarajevo. In 1903, the Synod made him an Archimandrite, and a few months later elected him a Bishop for the Eparchy of Zahumije and Herzegovina, and he was consecrated on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1903, in the city of Mostar. He would serve in Zahumije and Herzegovina for the next 17 years, until in 1920, he would be transferred to Dabar-Bosna, after the previous Bishop, Evgenije (Letica), retired. This would be confirmed by a royal charter on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1920.

During his time as a Bishop, he would help consecrate new churches, including the Church of St. Michael the Archangel in Baljci near Bilech (1904). A Church to Sts. Peter and Paul in Lukavica near Nevesinje and a Church dedicated to St. George in Brvenik (1906), a Church dedicated to Sts. Joachim and Anna (1907), a church dedicated to St. Basil of Ostrog near the Neretva river and a Church to the Ascension of the Lord in Ljuto Dol in Dobra (1908), a cathedral dedicated to the Holy Transfiguration, a Church to Sts. Peter and Paul and another Church to St. Basil of Ostrog (1910), and finally a Church to Sts. Constantine and Helena in 1911. He also ordained fourteen priests for his diocese, supplanting a shortage of clergy.

After the invasion of Yugoslavia, Metropolitan Petar was advised by his flock to leave Bosnia (which found itself under NDH control) and go to Serbia or Montenegro. To which he replied: "I am the people's shepherd, I am bound to stay and share evil with these people, as well as share good with people; thus I have to share the destiny of my people and stay where I am supposed to."

He consistently defended the Orthodox Faith, and openly disregarded the NDH's

ban of the Cyrillic alphabet. Roman Catholic bishop, Bozhidar Bralo, who was the administrator of Bosnia for the Ustashe, issued the warrant of arrest for Metropolitan Petar.

Metropolitan Petar was arrested on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1941, at the age of 88 years old. He was at first imprisoned in the Beledija prison. Three days later, he was transferred to the Kerestinic concentration camp, where he had been stripped of his monastic habit and Bishop's Panagia. He was forcibly shaved and thrown in the damp cells of the former castle turned prison. He was given the prisoner number 29781. He was tortured daily and the threat of death was constant. He was kept in Kerestinic until its closure in August of 1941.

He was moved to Koprivnica prison in August of 1941, and then he was moved to either Jasenovac or Gaspich, with a layover in either Zagreb or Sarajevo. One witness who saw Metropolitan Petar in Koprivnica prison recalled having seen Metropolitan Petar being taken outside in the late hours of a rainy night, and being beaten with rifle stocks and being told to “give sermons” like he preached “to the Serbs in Sarajevo.”

Bishop Nektarije (Krulj) of Zvornik-Tuzlan desperately tried to find the whereabouts of Metropolitan Petar, and organize campaigns for his release. He wrote a letter to Patriarch Gavriilo V who was in exile informing him of Metropolitan Petar's disappearance. Patriarch Gavriilo placed Vladyka Nektarije in charge of the Diocese of Dabar-Bosna as a result.

According to Jovo Furtula and Jovo Lubura from Sarajevo, Metropolitan Petar was killed in Jasenovac, where he was burned alive in one of the ovens used for brick-making. Another account says he was transferred to the Jadovno camp, and was tortured there in a “monstrous manner”, finally being hit in the head with a hammer and his relics being thrown in a ravine where chemicals were poured.

Metropolitan Petar reposed in 1942, as a Gestapo officer writing in that year mentioned Metropolitan Petar as still being alive – though in poor health due to torture – and having been moved to a hospital in Stenjevec in Zagreb, and close to death.

To date, the place of St. Petar's relics, and the exact date of his Martyrdom are unknown. His memory is celebrated on September 17<sup>th</sup>, and there are two churches under construction in Serbia that will be dedicated in his memory.



## **---ST. BRANKO DOBROSAVLJEVICH---**

Branko Dobrosavljevich was born in the village of Skrad, near Vojnich, on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1886. He completed his high school education and then enrolled in seminary at the School of Theology in Sremski Karlovci in 1908. He married and was ordained a Deacon on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, and then ordained to the Priesthood on the 22<sup>th</sup> of March, both in the year 1909.

He served multiple villages in the Blagaj region, including Buhacha, Radovica and Veljun. For his service and dedication to the people, he received the Order of St. Sava and the Order of the Yugoslav Crown in the Fifth Degree, which he had received on the feast of St. George in 1924. He had one son, named Nebojs, who was a medical student. Sometime before 1941, he was made an Archpriest, his wife had also reposed during this time.

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1941, Ustashe Justice minister, Mirko Puk, requested that the officer Vladimir Zhidovec – the secretary of the Ustashe's Karlovac municipality – select lawyers and soldiers he deemed to be “upstanding Croatians” to be sent to the Blagaj region and remove the Serbs. Zhidovec selected officer Vjekoslav Lubrich (who was the commander of the “Crusader” organization) and the Roman Catholic bishop Ivica Sharich to be sent there. Thus began the “Blagaj massacre”, many of the local Croatian peasants also participated in massacre.

When the Ustashe arrived in Veljun in the Blagaj region on May 6<sup>th</sup>, they arrested Fr. Branko and his son Nebojs as they were celebrating their very own Slava on the feast of St. George the Great Martyr. Along with them, they arrested the parish priest of Cvijanovich Brdo, Fr. Dimitrije Shkopuran. At first they were held in the police station in Veljun, and early in the morning hours of the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, they took Fr. Branko, Nebojs and Fr. Dimitrije into the woods called “Kestenovac” in the Blagaj region.

The Ustashe forced Fr. Branko to do a funeral service over his still living son Nebojs. The Martyrs were forced to dig their own graves, and Nebojs and Fr. Dimitrije were hacked into pieces with axes by the Ustashe soldiers. Fr. Branko was forced to say a pannikhida while his son was chopped into pieces. Fr. Branko was then brutally tortured, with his hair and beard being torn out, his ears cut off, and his eyes being gouged out, before the Ustashe skinned him alive. Only in 1946 was St. Branko, St. Dimitrije and St. Nebojs' relics found in a mass grave near

Veljun.

Despite the cruelty of the Ustashe, Lubrich and Sharich claimed the men under his command were being “too lenient” on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941. On the same day, the Ustashe shot and killed 32 Serbs. In the village of Otecac in Blagaj, 331 Serbs were killed together with their priest – who was tortured to death. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, 36 Serbs were taken behind the Blagaj School and tortured, and buried in a mass grave, with the only survivor, Dushan Nikshich, having played dead to survive. A Croatian woman recalled having seen Luburich “pouring water from a bucket to wash his hands of blood...” during the massacre, the same woman also recalled that the stench of death made everyone in the entire region sick, and unable to eat or sleep for several days.

Another local Croatian woman – whose husband had participated in the killings – recalled that he would come home in the late hours of the night, having been murdering Serbs all day, would eat a small meal, and sleep for a few hours, and then before the sun arose, in the early morning hours, would go back to participate in more killings.

The Ustashe then proceeded to loot the homes of the murdered residents of the villages of Blagaj, stealing valuables and livestock. Before the bodies were buried, quicklime was spread to speed up decomposition. Many local Croats heard screams and gunshots across the nights of May 6<sup>th</sup> to May 10<sup>th</sup>, but were told not to ask questions or attempt to help the Serbs, or they would be treated the same as them. Vjekoslav Lubrich was given a medal for “heroism” by the Ustashe for his part in the Blagaj massacre, during which, over 600 Serbs were killed.

St. Branko Dobrosavljevich, his son, St. Nebojs and St. Dimtrije Shkopuran are celebrated in the Orthodox Church on May 7<sup>th</sup>. The New Martyrs of Blagaj are commemorated on the same day. From May 6<sup>th</sup> to May 10<sup>th</sup>, pannikhidas are seen being done in the Orthodox cemeteries for the many victims of the Ustashe. The relics of Sts. Branko, Nebojs and Dimitrije were taken to the Orthodox cemetery in Belun, where a monument was erected by their graves.

### **---ST. SAVA OF GORNJI KARLOVAC---**

Svetozar Traljich was born in Mol on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1884 to the parents Stefan and Jelisaveta (maiden name Karakashevich). He finished elementary school in his hometown, then high school in Novi Sod. After high school graduation, he

enrolled in the School of Theology in Sremski Karlovci. After obtaining a degree in Theology, he graduated from the School of Law at the University of Belgrade, and passed the bar exam in the School of Law at the University of Zagreb.

Shortly after his marriage, he was ordained a deacon by the Romanian Bishop Gheorghe (Letich, who later joined the Serbian Orthodox Church after the Calendar change in 1925) of Timisoara – who was given a blessing by the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church to ordain Fr. Sevtozar – on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1909.

He was elevated to the priesthood on January 27<sup>th</sup> of the same year. He served as a parish priest in Pechka and later in Bashaid (1911-1927) in Serbian Banat. In 1927, he was elected as a temporary diocesan administrator for Serbian Banat, and a few months later as the main secretary of the Synod.

In 1928, his wife reposed, with whom they could not bear children. On October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1929, in the Krushedol monastery, he took monastic vows and was tonsured with the name Sava, after St. Sava I of Serbia, at the same time being made an Archpriest. Due to his humility and gift of discernment, he was elected the Igumen of the Krushedol monastery, and later he became an Archimandrite.

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, Sava was elected as a Vicar Bishop of Sremski Karlovci. He was consecrated there by Patriarch (St.) Varnava, Bishop Emilijan of Timok, Bishop Jovan of Nish, Bishop Tikhon of the Eparchy of Zahumije and Herzegovina, and Bishop Simeon of Zletovo and Strumica. As a Patriarchal Vicar, Bishop Sava chaired the Diocesan Council of the Archbishopric of Belgrade and Karlovci.

After the Martyrdom of Patriarch St. Varnava in 1937, Bishop Sava would chair the ecclesiastical court of the Synod. On June 22<sup>th</sup>, 1938, he was made the ruling Bishop of Gornji Karlovac, with his residence being in Plashki. In January of 1941, he was made the administrator for the Diocese of Pakrac, after the repose of Bishop Miron of Pakrac. He served for the first time at Pakrac in March of 1941, at the Cathedral Church. It also happened this was the first time a Hierarchal Liturgy had been served there in seven years, as Bishop Miron was left disabled by a broken leg.

The great rejoicing that came from the Hierarchal Liturgy was short lived, as after the Invasion of Yugoslavia, the Italian army that occupied Plashki warned Bishop Sava that he should leave Karlovac. Fr. Jovan Sliashki recalled that Aloysius

Stepinach wrote a letter to Bishop Sava threatening that if he did not leave he would “liquadated”. Bishop Sava responded to the Papist priest who delivered the letter: “Tell him (Stepinach) I'll give my head, but I won't leave my people!”

Bishop Sava, nine priests and thirteen pious laypeople were arrested by the Ustashe on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May, 1941, after they stormed Plashki when the Italian army left. They were moved from the Bishop's residence and forced to live in a horse stable converted into a prison, in Plaskom. There they were overseen by Josaf Tomlenovich, an infamous executioner. Tomlenovich offered that if Vladyka Sava disclosed where all the money from the Diocese treasury and records of baptized Orthodox Serbs were, he would spare his life and let him travel to Belgrade.

Vladyka Sava refused, and soon him, and three priests, Fr. Bogoljub Garkovich, Fr. Djuro Stojanovich, and Fr. Stanislav Nasadilo were separated from the rest of the group and brought to the Gospich concentration camp. While there, they underwent horrific tortures. Around the same time, the Ustashe arrested an additional 600 Serbs from the village of Kosinj in Gornij Karlovac, and murdered them.

From here, there are two different accounts about the Martyrdom of Bishop Sava. Both accounts state that he was loaded into a truck, in a caravan with 2,000 other Serbs on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1941. One account claimed that he was taken to the Velebit mountains – an area the Ustashe often used for their killings, due to the rocky cliffs where they would throw Serbs off to their death – and killed there, along with thousands of other Serbs.

Another account states he was sent to the island of Pag (later used by the Communists as a labour camp) off the coast of the Adriatic, where is buried along with thousands of other people killed by the Ustashe or Communists. His relics have never been found. The Church celebrates the memory of St. Sava of Gornij Karlovac on July 17<sup>th</sup>.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF BJELOVAR---**

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, the German officer Josip Verhas appointed the Ustashe officer Djuro Vojnovich as the commander of the Bjelovar region. The following day, the Ustashe organized a militia to patrol the region of Bjelovar, and look for Serbs who owned weapons – in an attempt to stop an uprising. The Croatians were

convinced that an uprising would occur on the feast day of St. George, on May 6<sup>th</sup>.

On April 26<sup>th</sup>, the Roman Catholic bishop Ivica Sharich arrived in Bjelovar region, and organized a mass arrest of 530 Serbians from the village of Grubishno Polje. The prisoners were at first transferred to the Danica camp near Koprivnica, and then the men were separated from the women and children and taken to either Gospich, Pag island or Jasenovac. The women and children were sent to Stara Gradishka. Most of the Serbs in this group were later killed.

On the same day, a skirmish in the village of Gudovac in Bjelovar occurred, two days later, on April 28<sup>th</sup>, the Ustashe arrested 200 more Serbs from Gudovac, including the local Orthodox priest, Fr. Mihailo. At first they were held in the Gudovac town hall, and kept in an open air section in the spring rain for over a week. While held there, the Ustashe brutally tortured the group, and forced them to sing pro-Ustashe songs and shout: “Long live Pavelich!”

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, in the early morning hours, the Serbs were marched to a field, and lined up. Accompanied by German officers, the Ustashe militiamen executed the 200 Serbs. Many including young men survived the initial fire, and some of the local Croats from Gudovac were hesitant to kill the wounded men, and were yelled at by the German officers to “finish the job” or else they would be next. Four men survived by playing dead, and they could recall some of the Ustashe cursing them for their Orthodox faith. In total, 196 Serbs, including Fr. Mihailo, were killed on the morning of May 5<sup>th</sup>.

The Ustashe made no attempt to deny or hide the massacre, instead rather publishing pictures of the victims in local newspapers, to spread terror among the Serbs – this decision was made by Mladen Lorkovich. In German sources, they claimed the men executed were “bandits” and “agitators.” The Ustashe forced the remainder of Gudovac's inhabitants to bury the 196 victims in a mass grave. Quicklime was spread over it to speed up decomposition.

In the days following the massacre, 20 Croats were killed by the Ustashe for speaking out against the massacre. In the months following, two other German officers hearing the news of the massacre were horrified, and ordered the arrest of many men who were responsible.

The Ustashe who were arrested were later released after Lorkovich met with the German ambassador to the NDH, Siegfried Kasche, and convinced the German

Wehrmacht general in Yugoslavia, Hermann Reinecke, to release the men responsible for the Gudovac massacre.

This was not the end of violence in the Bjelovar region. In a particularly horrific crime of the Ustashe, only a month after the Gudovac massacre, 250 Serbian men were buried alive by the Ustashe in the region. Roman Catholic bishop Alojzije Mishich wrote that “3,700 schismatics were killed” in Bjelovar within the first six months of the NDH's creation. The memory of the victims and of St. Mihailo is kept on May 5<sup>th</sup>.

### **---ST. DJORDJE OF NASHICE---**

Djordje Bogich was born in Pakrac on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1911. He studied grammar in school at Nova Gradishka and went to seminary in Sarajevo. On May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1934, Djordje was ordained a celibate priest in his hometown of Pakrac. Djordje served in Pakrac, Majar and Bolmache, being a parish priest for all three villages.

In 1940, he was transferred to Nashice, where he was during the invasion of Yugoslavia. On June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1941, he was arrested by the Ustashe. A Serbian man by the name Proko Prejnovich, who hid from the Ustashe during the round ups by climbing a tree, witnessed the Martyrdom of Fr. Djordje and wrote the following:

“Ustashas tied Father to a tree before they began this atrocity... They cut off Father's ears, his nose, and then his tongue. All while in ecstasy and joy, they pulled out his beard with such force it took most of the skin with it. The young priest, exhausted, cried out in pain. He was still a young man, only thirty years old and quite healthy and strong. The whole time however, Father stood upright, so that the Ustashe could do their cruelty.

After they gouged out his eyes, he still stood upright. So they cut open his stomach and finally did Fr. Bogich collapse... One Ustasha could see his heart was still beating and shouted: 'Curse your Serbian mother, whose heart is still beating!' After this, the Ustashas set Father on fire, which shortened his pain and suffering.”

Another witness, Viktor Novak, who wrote about these events in his work “Magnum Crimen”, published in Zagreb in 1948, gave the following account:

“On the night of June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1941, Feliks Lahner, a Croatian milkman from Nashice, accompanied two Ustashas into Father Djordje's apartment, and ordered him to

come with them as so they could interrogate him. He obeyed their orders and got into a car. They took Fr. Djordje to a local field, used for grazing by cattle, outside of Nashice.

This field was close to a Roman Catholic chapel dedicated to St. Martin of Tours. The Ustashe tied him to a tree and cut off his ears, nose and tongue, and tore his beard from his face. After this, they took out his eyes, the whole time swearing and shouting at him. In the end, one of the Ustaschas cut open his belly, then took out his intestines and wrapped them around Father's neck. Only then did Fr. Djordje collapse and lose consciousness.

After he collapsed, the Ustashes cut the rope Fr. Djordje was tied to the tree with. His body fell to the ground, where the Ustaschas finally killed him by pouring fire on fuel on him and lighting him on fire. The person guilty of killing this Martyr was a Roman Catholic priest from Nashice, Friar Sidonije Solch. One of the witnesses said: 'He (Friar Sidonije Solch) had our parish priest, Fr. Djordje Bogich, killed in a barbaric manner. They took him out in the middle of the night and butchered him...'"

St. Djordje's body lay in the field all night until the following morning and afternoon. His body was found at around 4:00 PM. The Ustashe commander of Nashice ordered local Romani Gypsies to take the relics of St. Djordje to Brezik Nashichki and bury them in the graveyard there. The Church celebrates Fr. Djordje's memory on June 17<sup>th</sup>. A Church dedicated to his memory is being built in Slavoski Brod, on top of a Church that existed dedicated to the Great Martyr George that was destroyed by the Croatian Army during the war in 1991.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF GACKO---**

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1941, a Ustashe detachment under the command of Herman Tongl – nicknamed “Kresho” – arrived in the village of Gacko. Shortly after their arrival, they attempted to win support of the Muslim Bosniaks, by claiming if they took up arms, they would be given the land that belonged to the Serbs.

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, Tongl ordered that all Serbian men, 15 years and older, from the villages of Korita and Zagradci, report to a building in the village of Stepen. They were told to show up that they might be given passports to cross into Montenegro, and if they did not, they would be executed. A hundred Serbs showed up, and were immediately arrested, and held in the Sokol cultural club in Korita for the

next two days.

Two days later, on June 4<sup>th</sup>, Tongl informed the prisoners they would be sent to Germany for forced labour. They were taken with another group of prisoners, numbering one hundred that were held in the local school building, and tied together with chains in groups of two or three by their ankles. They were loaded into trucks and taken to the Golubnjacha limestone quarry near Kobilja Glava.

A survivor of this massacre, Nosovich Obren, testified the following:

“When we arrived by car to the quarry, there were about 100-200 Ustashas – I could not recognize any of them since it was dark – and they began to unload us from the trucks, after which each group of two or three was brought to the edge of the quarry pit, there they would fire their weapons at us, and beat us with clubs, axes, picks and poles. When they saw each one was dead, they would shove them into the pit.

When I was brought to the pit, I was tied to Krsto Svorcan. One of the Ustashas fired their rifle at us, from a point blank distance. Krsto fell down, and dragged me with him into the pit. Because I did not make a noise, the Ustashe thought we were both dead. One of the Ustashas shoved Krsto Svorcan and me into the pit with a pole... During the fall, I landed on Krsto's body, and the bodies of the other people killed... Due to this, I only broke a rib on my left side...”

Another survivor found by Serbian peasants on the morning of June 7<sup>th</sup>, testified of these events, however he succumbed to his injuries two hours later. Around 180 people were killed on the night of June 6<sup>th</sup> by the Ustashe. One other survivor of this event, a priest by the name of Fr. Radojica Perishich, would later help the Serbian Chetniks, and organize the first rebellion against the Ustashe and their genocide of Serbs.

Tongl himself went on to perform many more massacres, as he is recorded at a Ustashe party meeting saying: “We cannot be satisfied and will not stop until the total extermination of all Serbians in our Independent State of Croatia. The last bullet for the last Serb.”

Records from the event show that most of the militiamen were not Croatians, but rather Bosniak Muslims.



## **---NEW MARTYRS OF VLASENICA---**

Even before the Invasion of Yugoslavia, certain Muslim men from the area of Vlasenica, including their Imams, had a list of around 200 Serbs they wanted to be killed. On June 22<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the German army left Vlasenica. The same day, Ustashe from Sarajevo came in under the command of the officer Mutevelich, who was a carpet salesman. Daily he organized arrests and persecutions against the Serbs.

On the night of June 22<sup>th</sup>, Mutevelich ordered the arrest of seven Serbian men, including three priests, the Archpriest Fr. Dushan Bobar, and two parish priests, Fr. Dragomir Maskijevich and Fr. Janko Savich. All of them were taken to Rashicha Gaj and killed on the very same night.

Between June 22<sup>nd</sup> and July 20<sup>th</sup>, 85 more men were killed. They were taken to an improvised prison near Vlasenica. They would then be transported to Rashicha Gaj and killed. One group of forty and another forty-five. One of these groups included Fr. Ljubo Jakshich, a parish priest from Han Pijesak.

Another 200 residents of Vlasenica were imprisoned by the Ustashe and sent to either the Jadovno concentration camp or Slana camp on Pag island. Of the Serbs killed in Rashicha Gaj, their bodies were buried in ravines and caves around the area.

At the end of July and beginning of August, 1941, an additional 50 Serbs, mostly from Milichi, were imprisoned and murdered. On August 12<sup>th</sup>, one of the most shocking crimes of the Ustashe would occur. The Ustasas would murder 100 Serbs in their homes in Drinjacha. The Ustashe militamen gouged the eyes out of the corpses and put them in a basket.

This basket was seen by an Italian war journalist named Curzio Malaparte on the desk of the dictator of the NDH, Ante Pavelich, when he visited him for an interview in September of 1941 in Zagreb. Pavelich boasted of the murders that occurred in Drinjacha and stated that was where the eyes came from.

In total, 241 Serbs were murdered by the Ustashe in Vlasenica district, including four priests, between June and August. Many of the local Muslims participated in the killings, and selected the men who would be killed by the Ustashe.

## **---ST. RAFAILO OF SHISHTOVAC---**

Djordje Momchilovich was born on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1875 to the parents Velimir and Persida, in the village of Bachka, in the region of Deronje near Odzhak, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (modern day Croatia). He finished elementary school in his hometown. At the age of ten, his parents sent him to the Kovilj monastery, while there, he fell in love with the monastic life, and desired to become a monk.

From Kovilj, he moved to the Bodjani monastery. In 1896, he was tonsured a monk with the name Rafailo by the Igumen, Fr. Miron (Djordjevic, who later became the Bishop of Pakrac) in the Manasija monastery. The same year, Metropolitan Mihailo of Dalmatia ordained him a Hierodeacon. He moved back to the Bodjani monastery, and finally in 1907, he was in the Bukovo monastery, where he was tonsured a Hieromonk.

During much of his youth and time in the monastic life, he studied iconography. He traveled to Moscow to study iconography there, and lived in the courtyard of the Serbian embassy, in open air like – St. Alexis, Man of God. He traveled to Belgrade to view and study iconography, and went to Rome and Venice as well. He enrolled at the School of Art in Belgrade that was founded by Kirill Kutlik, and was taught by the famous painter Nadezhda Petrovich.

His first major work on iconography came as a request from the Queen of Serbia, Draga Obrenovich (who along with her husband, King Alexander, were murdered by the Masonic “Black Hand” in 1903). He painted the iconostasis in the Church at Velika Krsna in 1902 for the Queen. He also painted the iconostases in the Rakovica monastery in 1905-1906, in Pacir and Gornij Kovilje (1908-1910) and in the Ruzhica Church in Belgrade (1925-1926), which was his last work.

He painted dozens of individual icons of Saints, and did portraits of clerics and states figures in the Kingdom of Serbia. He also did landscape paintings, which were quite well received and shown in art exhibitions in Serbia prior to the Second World War. He also painted a Church in Debonje, at an unknown date. His art made him quite a bit of money, which he distributed to the poor. He did buy an automobile for himself, being the first person in Deronjama to own an automobile. He used the car to travel to many villages that did not have a priest in order to serve them.

Sometime before the invasion of Yugoslavia, he moved to Shishtovac, and was

elected Igumen, and eventually made an Archimandrite. Most of the monks of Shishtovac left due to fear of the Ustashe, but Fr. Rafailo stayed with three monks. On August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1941, he was arrested along with his three monks, and placed on a train from Shishtovac to Slavonska Pozhega. Fr. Rafailo was tortured during the journey. At one point, the Ustashas forced him to serve his own funeral. When he was brought to Pozhega, he was exhausted from torture, and gave up his spirit to God on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1941. To date, the location of his grave and relics is not known.

Many of his art works and icons were destroyed during the Second World War by the Ustashe or by Allied bombing raids. A majority of his works that survived were art pieces he placed on a carriage of some of the monks who left Shishtovac monastery after the creation of the NDH and travelled to Belgrade. A village in Vojvodina is named after him, and many of his portrait and landscape works are in the Matica Srpska Gallery in Novi Sad. His memory is kept by the Church on September 3<sup>rd</sup>.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF PREBILOVCI---**

Prebilovci is a small village near Chapljina. It had a mostly Serbian population, with previous generations of Serbs having served in the Herzegovina uprising (1875-1878) against the Turks, and also in the First World War. On the night of August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the village was surrounded by 3,000 Ustashas, who were all Croatians from the local area.

In the following days, the Ustashe separated the men from the women and children, and took the women and children, numbering 650, to Shurmanci and threw them into the ravines after severe tortures. Some perished before being thrown in the pits, but many others were still alive. Many women were pregnant, and some children were as young as 4 months old.

The next day, the men of Prebilovci, and other Serbs who were rounded up from Herzegovina were brought by six trucks to the cliffs near the river Neretva. They were marched to the cliffs and thrown off by the Ustashas there. In the village of Prebilovci itself, the Ustashe militamen killed 50 infants by taking them out of their cradles dashing them into the brick wall of the local school.

The commander of the Ustashe, Ivan Jovanovich (who was nicknamed “the Black”) allowed for the men under his command to defile the women, including

young girls. On August 6<sup>th</sup>, Jovanovich took 1,000 Serbian prisoners, including women and children to the Golubinka pits, and entire families were pushed into the pits, with a drop of over a hundred meters. These killings happened over the course of six hours.

One of the witnesses of this event was the Roman Catholic bishop Alojzije Mishich, described the following:

“People were captured like animals. Slaughtered, killed, and thrown alive into the abyss. Women, expecting mothers, girls and infants, both male and female were all thrown into the pits. The Vice Mayor of Mostar, Baljich (a Mohammedian); proclaimed publicly to us as a clerk of the state that we should keep silent about these events. In the town of Ljubnija, in one pit alone, 700 of the Orthodox Christians were thrown. From Mostar and Chapljina six rail wagons full of wives, mothers and girls – most younger than ten – were brought to the station of Shurmanci. They are taken to the hills and thrown off the deep cliffs. Everyone tossed down the cliffs is killed. In Klepci and the surrounding villages, 4,000 Orthodox Christians were killed...”

An entire clan of 78 members were killed in the Golubinka pit. The Ustashe militiamen drank alcohol and celebrated the entire time, shouting curses at the Orthodox Church and Serbian people. 170 people did survive by landing on the bodies of slain Serbs. On August 6<sup>th</sup>, 300 infants and young children were killed alone.

Of the 170 survivors, all of them testified that two Roman Catholic priests, Ilija Tomas and Marko Hovko, were among the murderers. Over 4,000 people were killed and thrown into 15 separate pits across the Prebilovci area across several weeks. Among the victims was the parish priest of Prebilovci, Hiermonk Philemon.

An Italian brigadier general who witnessed some of the massacres in the area, Alessandro Luzan, tells of how a school teacher named Stana Arnautovich was defiled and then murdered by the Ustashe in front of her students. He stated the man who defiled and murdered St. Stana was in fact a Roman Catholic priest, by the name of Merjan Nikola. General Luzan sent a letter to a Roman Catholic cardinal, stating his open disgust and shock that the Vatican would allow their clergy to do such things and go unpunished.

Another woman, Mara Bulut, who survived the massacre, testified that her sister and uncle, Stoja and Maksim, had both been defiled and killed. One of the Ustashas who refused to follow orders to commit such a horrific act, was in turn tortured and murdered along with Sts. Stoja and Maksim.

Italian army officers tried to arrest many of the men responsible for the massacres at Prebilovci. However, due to the intervention of Ustashe officials, and a request forwarded to the leader of Italy, Benito Mussolini, the Italian army were forced to release the Ustashe militiamen who had committed these crimes.

A Church was built near the Golubinka pits, and housed the remains of the 4,000 Martyrs. In 1992, the Croatian Army destroyed the Church and burned down the Serbian village nearby. They threw bombs into the crypt and destroyed many of the relics. The Church was not rebuilt and the surviving relics were brought to Belgrade. At the Cathedral of St. Sava in Belgrade, there is a large reliquary and icon of the New Martyrs of Prebilovci. The Church keeps their memory on August 6th.

The Communists attempted to destroy many of the relics of the Martyrs by pouring acid down the pits after the war. The relics were only collected and solemnly transferred in 1990. The UBDA did not allow any mention of the massacres around Prebilovci to be mentioned in newspapers or writing during the Communist period. Ivan Jovanovich later joined the Communist party of Yugoslavia and became a killer for them. Despite murdering thousands for their Orthodox Faith, he is honored in modern day Croatia, as a monument exists with his name, and about 1,200 other Ustashas' names in Chapljina for his fight for "Croatian freedom."

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF BANSKI GRABOVAC---**

On July 24<sup>th</sup>, the Ustashe captured the village of Banski Grabovac, under the pretext of quelling banditry in the area. 1,200 Serbs were arrested and brought to the local train station by July 25<sup>th</sup>. The Ustashas killed 800 Serbs there by the train station. The 400 survivors were sent to the Jadovno concentration camp, and killed there. Nearly the entire village's Serbian population was killed. Around ~1,100 were killed from the Banski Grabovac region. The Serbs killed at the train station were buried in a mass grave nearby. The memory of the Martyrs of Banski Grabovac is celebrated on July 24<sup>th</sup>.

## **---NEW MARTYRS OF GARAVICE---**

In June of 1941, the Ustashe commander of Bihach, Ljubomir Kvaternik (the brother of Slavko Kvaternik, co-founder of the Ustashe party, and Minister of the Armed forces of the NDH) ordered all Serbs from the Bihach region to be arrested. At first the Serbs were held in a makeshift prison in Kula. The Ustashe prepared the areas of Garavice, Karadjordjevo Selo and Ceravice to be turned into execution grounds. The Serbian prisoners were told they were being sent to Germany for forced labour.

The killings in the region started in July of 1941, at first, the Ustashe would strip the victims naked, and slit their throats with “Srbosjek” knives and throw them into pre-dug mass graves, all done during the day. The Ustashe also would carry out executions in villages around Bihach.

Between July and September 1941, 12,000 Serbs were killed in Garavice alone. After a while, the Ustashe ran out of room for mass graves and started throwing the bodies of their victims into the Klokot and Una rivers, which contaminated drinking water for hundreds of villages downstream.

One witness, Milka Pepich-Kovachevich states: “The Ustashe massacre began on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1941, when the first twelve villagers were taken from Pitroka. On the second night, they arrested another one hundred and sixty people from Pitrochan. Most of them children. They were taken away and most likely killed by the Ustashe executioners Mate Kolich, Marko Grgich and Dushan Mihaljich... The Ustashe demanded those who were relatives of the people they arrested provide food for their family members, whom they had already killed...”

Many Serbs, including most of the children, were given an offer by the Franciscan priest Marian to convert to Roman Catholicism to save their lives. Many children, including a Dushan and Djuro, refused this offer and were killed. Friar Marian wrote to the governor of Cazin: “Although lately I have sent an account of the faithful converts of the region... Communicate with the officers that they must tell them (the Serbs), convert or they will be exterminated.”

In September 1941, the area of Garavice was overrun by the Communist partisans, and was evacuated by the Ustashe, who left most of the documents detailing their own account of the massacres behind. The Communists attempted to hide what happened at Garavice, and the events were not known by the greater public until

1981 when the documents were published.

Among these documents were reports that they had “liquidated 12,000 Eastern Greeks (Orthodox).” Orders to a Ramu Melkoch to “...kill all Vlachs, suspicious or not” (the Ustashe did not consider Serbs to be Slavs, but rather Vlachs) and orders to “...kill everyone ages 16 to 100. Don't let go of any that come into your hands...”

A memorial was built in 1981, and became a public site. During the Yugoslav wars (1991-1995), the region fell under control of the Bosnian and Croatian army, and was left abandoned. Today, the site is routinely vandalized by pro-Ustashe, and anti-Serbian and anti-Orthodox graffiti.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF SHABAC---**

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1941, an operation launched by the German Wehrmacht with help from the newly re-organized Ustashe “Domobran” (Home Guard) army, under the pretext of destroying Chetnik resistance in the Machva area. The operation was codenamed the “Machva operation” or “Cleansing the Sava.”

On September 24<sup>th</sup>, the Wehrmacht and Domobran besieged Shabac. When the Germans captured the city, they arrested 21,000 Serbian civilians, including women and children. They took 6,000 Serbs to an interment camp that had been set up by the Ustashe outside of the city.

On September 29<sup>th</sup>, the 6,000 Serbian prisoners were executed in mass shootings across the area of Shabac, and dumped into mass graves. Many Wehrmacht soldiers took the bodies of the victims and impaled them on stakes, and put them in the center of Shabac city. The massacre was carried out across several days, lasting until October 8<sup>th</sup>.

The commander of the Wehrmacht, Franz Bohme, launched another campaign against Cer-Iverak on October 10<sup>th</sup>. After a week of pillaging and burning many villages in the area, on October 17<sup>th</sup>, they captured the towns of Valjevo and Krupanj, and arrested an additional 1,300 civilians. Of which they murdered 635 of them in the same way they did at Shabac.

In total, the Wehrmacht killed 6,635 civilians. Much of the Machva region was destroyed, with many of the survivors having to leave the area. The German

Wehrmacht command called it a “successful cleansing” and thanked the “efforts of the Ustashe.”

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF KRALJEVO---**

On October 15<sup>th</sup> (October 2<sup>nd</sup> O.S.), 1941, while the Orthodox people were celebrating the afterfeast of the Protection of the Mother of God, the Wehrmacht officer over Kraljevo, Wilhelm Keitel, ordered that “reprisal killings” be done after an attack a few days prior, and that for every one German soldier killed, 100 Serbs would be shot, and for every German soldier injured, 50 would be shot.

That same day, 300 Serbs were arrested, and summarily executed by firing squad, the people were described as being “nationalists” by the Wehrmacht. All of them were innocent civilians. Over the course of the next few days, more orders for men to be arrested and executed were issued, with the Wehrmacht going house to house and arresting all men ages fourteen to sixty.

Over a thousand Serbian men were arrested, and brought to a makeshift prison in a former rail factory. When the “prison” was full, the Wehrmacht officers ordered 100 men to dig a mass grave, and then they were shot with machine guns. The Wehrmacht soldiers would check each body for signs of life, and kill any survivors of the initial volley with a shot from a pistol.

Once the group of one hundred was killed, the Germans would return to the factory and repeat this process. Among those killed was a local parish priest, Fr. Nikolaj Zhichkin, who was beaten by the Germans, and one of the Wehrmacht soldiers testified later that to mock him, he was forced to wash the feet of a German officer at the factory, mirroring what is done on Holy Thursday with the washing of feet.

By October 17<sup>th</sup>, the Wehrmacht in their own records stated 1,736 men were shot, and 19 women as well – whom they started arresting after having trouble filling their quotas with men. It is worth noting, in the attack that spurred this entire event, only 14 German soldiers were injured. The massacre ended on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1941, with over 2,000 Serbs being killed.

The commander of the unit that carried out this massacre, Paul Hoffmann, personally oversaw the murders and wrote that he praised his men for their “enthuastic fulfillment of what was required of them.” Another officer praised the



men for their “bravery in action.” Twenty soldiers who participated in the massacres were awarded the Iron Cross in the 2nd Class (one of the highest military decorations in the Wehrmacht) for their roles.

The New Martyrs of Kraljevo and St. Nikolaj of Kraljevo are celebrated on October 2<sup>nd</sup> (O.S), the day the massacres began. The bodies of the murdered were reburied in the Orthodox cemetery in the city of Kraljevo. An icon depicting the New Martyrs of Kraljevo exists at the Jasenovac monastery.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF KRAGUJEVAC---**

On the same day, October 15<sup>th</sup>, a German battalion in Kragujevac (which is 100 kilometers south of Belgrade) started rounding up Serbian men between the ages of 16 and 60, and had a quota of 2,300 men to take as hostages, despite there having been no attacks on German soldiers in Kragujevac.

According to the district commander in Kragujevac, Otto von Bischofhausen – who wrote a detailed report of the massacre – they had arrested 2,300 Serbs by October 18<sup>th</sup>. In the report, Bischofhausen claimed the villages of Mechkovac and Marshich had been “mopped up”, and by October 19<sup>th</sup>, the villages of Groshnica and Milatovac had been cleared. 422 men were shot across these four villages.

The 2,300 Serbian hostages were assembled with another 4,700 hostages who were arrested in Kragujevac – many of whom were priests and monks – and brought to Stanovija field, outside of Kragujevac, and housed in a former Royal Yugoslav Army barracks.

The hostages had all their belongings stolen, even the priests were not exempt from this, as they had their pectoral crosses taken by Wehrmacht soldiers. Due to the efforts of Dimitrije Ljotich (who was a spiritual son of St. Nikolaj Velimirovich), he was able have 3,000 men, including most, but not all, of the priests and monks, removed from the quota.

In the early morning hours of October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1941, 2,300 hostages were selected from among the group, and brought to a field outside of town, and over a period of seven hours, they were shot. They were lined up in groups of either 50 or 120. One elderly teacher told the German soldiers to “go ahead and shoot.” According to Bischofhausen's report, many ethnic German civilians, who were Papists or Protestants, witnessed the shooting, jeering and cursing the Serbian men who were

being shot.

In total, all 2,300 hostages were killed by the Germans, including at least 5 priests, and 4 monks. In the following days, the Wehrmacht held a triumphant military parade in the streets of Kragujevac. The victims were buried in 31 separate mass graves outside of the town of Kragujevac. There was little attempt to hide the massacre, which horrified the local Serbian populace, and even many in the German Army. One of the victims of the massacre was a German soldier who refused to fire upon the hostages.

The victims of Kragujevac are remembered every year on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October. The town of Kragujevac was left almost entirely abandoned after the massacre, as most of the Serbian population left. The Communists unfortunately built their own memorials over the site, and refused to let Orthodox Christians collect any relics.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF PRIDVORICA---**

On January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1942 (December 25<sup>th</sup> O.S.), while the Serbian people of Pridvorica were celebrating the Nativity of Christ, the “Union of Mostar Muslims” recruited Croatian and Muslim men from the surrounding area of Pridvorica to kill the entire population of the village.

The Muslims and Croats arrived shortly after services had concluded in the Church, and when the townsfolk were gathering for a feast. Most of the inhabitants were locked in barns, which were set on fire, with Muslims and Ustashe militiamen sitting outside with firearms and knives to kill anyone attempting to escape.

Among those killed were women, children and the elderly, as well as the local priest, Fr. Dragutin. 180 Serbs were killed in total, with only a few survivors, including a small boy who hid in a tree, who witnessed his entire family being killed. Pridvorica remains abandoned to this day.

On April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1942, the relics of the Martyrs were transferred to two tombs next to the Church of St. Lazar in Gacko. In 2006, they were brought into the Church in a reliquary, and placed near the crypt.

The folk poet from Gacko, Obren Govedarica, described the massacre in detail in his poem, “Pokolj u Pridvorica.”

### ---NEW MARTYRS OF VOJVODINA---

Massacres were not exclusive to the Ustashe and Germans, as they also occurred in Vojvodina, which was under Hungarian occupation. On January 7<sup>th</sup> (December 25<sup>th</sup> O.S.), 1942, when the Orthodox were celebrating the feast of the Nativity of Christ, the Papist Hungarians rounded up civilians, including women and children, from the village of Curug, and moved them to barns and a school building. 1,000 Serbs were shot in Curug over the next few days.

The same day, the Hungarians moved into the villages of Gospodjinci and Titel, and rounded up more civilians and looted their homes. The following day, they raided the villages of Temerin and Zhabalj, and killed many Serbs. People were arrested at random, with some being arrested while they were going to work or even guests at a wedding.

The worst of the massacres in Vojvodina occurred in Novi Sad. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, Novi Sad was surrounded by the Hungarian army, with telephone lines and telegraph lines being cut off, and a curfew being placed. The following day, the Hungarians arrested 7,000 people. One woman who survived the massacre recalled that Hungarian soldiers entered her apartment and demanded to know her religious affiliation, she told them she was an Orthodox Christian, to which the Hungarian replied that she and her family were “stinking Serbs” and killed her five sons.

The victims were stripped naked and brought to an area known as the Shtrand, along the Danube river, while it was -29 degrees Celsius (-20 F) outside on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. The frozen river was broken up with explosives, and the Hungarians forced many of the Serbs to walk across it, and fall into the frozen river. Many victims who refused to walk across the frozen river were thrown in by Hungarian soldiers off a bridge, or shot with machine guns.

By the end of the Novi Sad massacre, 4,000 Serbs had lost their lives, including priests. The Hungarians staged a false flag attack in Stari Becej on January 29<sup>th</sup>, and followed it with another series of mass arrests. 200 people were brought to the bank of the Tisza river, stripped naked, and thrown alive in the frozen river. When the ice thawed, the bodies floated down the Tisza and Danube into Serbian villages.

The Bishop of Timok, (St.) Irenej (Chirich, who was later killed by the Communists) buried many of the victims personally. He gave sermons following the massacre telling Orthodox Christians to prepare for Martyrdom, and gave much of his personal wealth to the families of victims.

The perpetrators of the massacre avoided any legal repercussions, despite the Hungarian Lord of Novi Sad, Laszlo Deak, assuring survivors and victims' families the men responsible would be brought to justice. Many of the soldiers who participated in the massacres later joined the Communist Party of Hungary after the war, and continued their killings.

Today, the Holy Martyrs of Vojvodina (also known as the Holy Martyrs of Bachka) are celebrated on January 20<sup>th</sup> by the Orthodox Church.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF VOCHIN---**

On January 12<sup>th</sup>, 300 Ustashe militamen and Muslims entered the village of Vochin. The next day, they started plundering and burning homes of the local Serbs. Many of the militamen tried to defile women, and anyone who resisted or tried to flee was shot. The entire population was rounded up and taken to a field outside of the town.

On January 14<sup>th</sup> (January 1<sup>st</sup> O.S.), the feast of the Circumcision of the Lord and St. Basil the Great, 350 Serbs were murdered. The communes of Jorgichi, Zubovichi, Dobrichi, Kometnik and Sekulinci were completely depopulated.

One Croatian sergeant, Luka Mustalich, took pity on the Serbs. One of survivors, Sava Bojchich, recounted: "They led us to a small basement, and there was no place for everyone to sit, so many had to lay down on the floor. From the group, I was taken by a gendarme sergeant, Luka Mustalich, because he noticed I was a young boy, only 15 years old at the time. He took me from the cellar and brought me to a secure building, where he let me go when everything was over, after the shootings. He saved another nine Serbian men who were tasked with digging the graves."

The Ustashe buried the victims in a mass grave near the Vochinka river. Luka Mustalich's act of mercy for saving the lives of ten people cost him dearly, as he was threatened and targeted for assassination by the Ustashe. He fled to Slavonski Brod and lived there until after the war. He recounted much of the massacre in his

own testimony.

It was worth noting that this was after the Ustashe reformed its military into the “Domobran” (Home Guard), at the insistence of the Germans, to stop atrocities from happening. Despite the German military reorganizing the Ustashe ad hoc militias into formal armies, many massacres still occurred from late 1941 onward.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF DRAKULICH---**

On January 7<sup>th</sup> (December 25<sup>th</sup> O.S.) German military units left Banja Luka. The same day, Ustashe under the command of Viktor Gutich (who had previously had a role in the Martyrdom of St. Platon of Banja Luka), entered Banja Luka and started searching for Serbian civilians. Due to it being the Nativity of Christ for Orthodox Christians, they searched for homes where Christmas candles were being burned, and shot 43 Serbs.

The following day, Gutich and Nikola Zelich decreed “Eastern Greeks” (Orthodox Christians) were to be rounded up and gave the Orthodox Church in Banja Luka to the Roman Catholics. These actions were supported by the Roman Catholic bishop Jozo Garich, who thanked Gutich for his efforts in converting the Serbs.

Ustashe militamen started removing all Cyrillic signs and replacing them with Latin, and arrested hundreds of people. Many Serbs were sent to Jasenovac, Gaspich or Pag island at first. The people who were not sent to the concentration camps were brought to Drakulich, a village outside of Banja Luka, which had been converted into a prison camp.

On February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1942, the executions began. The victims would be brought to the Roman Catholic monastery in Petricevac and given a chance to convert to Papism. Between February 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 520 Serbs were murdered in the Papist monastery. One of the murderers was a Roman Catholic priest, Friar Miroslav Filipovich. They used sheaf knives (“Srbosjek”) to cut the throats of the victims, many of whom were children.

On February 7<sup>th</sup>, the Ustashe surrounded three villages in the Banja Luka region, Rakovac, Shargovac, and Motike. Serbs were forced to make the sign of the Cross and would be let go if they did it the Roman Catholic way. If they did it the Orthodox way, they would be killed instead.

In Rakovac, the Serbs were brought to coal mine, where they were caved in with explosives. In Shargovac, the Ustashe killed 52 children in an elementary school with knives. In Motike, they used sledgehammers to kill the Serbs.

On February 10<sup>th</sup>, the Ustashe raided the villages of Demirovac and Medjedja. Women and girls were defiled and then killed, and 82 infants were killed by the Ustashas. By February 12<sup>th</sup>, the Ustashe killed 2,311 Serbs, including 553 children.

The Communists attempted to hide the events that happened in Drakulic and the surrounding area. They arrested several people who attempted to speak or write about the events that happened in February of 1942. Only after the death of Josip Tito in 1980 did the event become widely known.

In 1991, a memorial for the victims was placed in Banja Luka. In 2009, a Church dedicated to St. George in Banja Luka placed a plaque with the known names of the victims in the narthex. Very few survived the massacre. One survivor, a woman by the name of Dobrila Martinovich, gave a report about the role of the Roman Catholic priest Filipovich in the massacre:

“Filipovich entered a school in Shargovac, and took a Serbian child, and received him gently, only to then murder him in front of the other children, who were horrified and started screaming. Filipovich then addressed the Ustashas and said: 'Men, I am baptizing these rejects in the Name of God. I am the first to accept the sin of murder, and I invite you to follow my example...'”

A Wehrmacht commander who witnessed these events wrote to a German ambassador to the NDH stating: “About 8 days ago, in the villages of Drakulich and Shargovac, near Banja Luka, 2,300 people, including women and children, all belonging to the Orthodox population there, were exterminated... The monks of a Franciscan monastery were behind this latest massacre.”

The Italians were horrified by this massacre, arrested Filipovich and many others involved. The Italian Royal Army was condemned by Aloysius Stepinach for arresting Friar Filipovich, and in October, they were forced to release him due to the intrigues of the Roman Catholic church. Filipovich later went to Stara Gradishka concentration camp, where he became infamous for the murder of prisoners.

The Church honors the memory of these Holy Martyrs on February 7<sup>th</sup>. There

exists an icon of the New Martyrs of Drakulich at the Jasenovac monastery, and at the Church of St. George in Banja Luka. The relics of many of the Martyrs, including all those killed at the Rakovac mine, were placed in a crypt below the Church of St. George in Banja Luka.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF KOZARA---**

In May of 1942, the Wehrmacht was planning an operation to clear the Kozara mountain region, and round up the entire Serbian population. The Germans sent 15,000 soldiers to the region, accompanied with 22,000 Ustashe soldiers, including the entirety of the notorious “Crna Legija” (Black Legion) of the Ustashe Home Guard.

On June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1942, the German and Ustashe soldiers entered the Kozara region and to clear it of Chetniks. 80,000 Serbian civilians fled the region, or hid in caves around the mountain of Kozara. Over the course of 38 days, civilians who didn't flee were captured by the Ustashe or Germans and killed or sent to concentration camps. Male victims captured by the Wehrmacht were sent to the Sajmishte concentration camp, ran by the Germans, near Zemun in Serbia. Women and men captured by the Ustashe were sent to either Jasenovac or Stara Gradishka. Most often however the Ustashe or Wehrmacht killed Serbs on the spot.

The number of Serbs killed near Kozara by the Ustashe and Germans is unknown, but its believed to been as high as 35,000 by the time the killings ended on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1941, it is estimated that 11,000 of those victims were under the age of sixteen. In 1991, an Orthodox Cross was placed near one of the mass graves found at the foot of the Kozara. Unlike many places during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, the Orthodox memorial at Kozara managed to escape vandalism.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF SYRMIA---**

On August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942, the Ustashe and Wehrmacht started arresting Serbs from the region of Syrmia. 4,000 people, including women, were arrested and brought to a prison in Mitrovica. Serbian prisoners were subjected to beatings, torture and women were defiled. An additional 3,000 Serbs were arrested across the month of August.

The Ustashe sentenced many of the Serbs to death for treason against the NDH. The worst massacre in Syrmia occurred on the night September 4<sup>th</sup> and morning of

September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1942. One thousand Serbs were taken to the Orthodox cemetery in Mitrovica. A priest was forced to read a pannikhida for the victims, before they were all shot.

Mass graves were dug by selected prisoners before, and the massacre took several hours. Many Serbs died due to starvation, disease and torture in prison. Across August and September 1942, according to the Wehrmacht, 7,000 Serbs were killed. Those who weren't killed were brought to Jasenovac.

The German officer attached to the Ustashe units in Syrmia called the killings: "...sadistic slaughter..." The Ustashe commander over Syrmia, Viktor Tomich, attempted to burn as many fields across Syrmia to incur a famine, and raided multiple villages across the region.

### **---ST. GORAZD OF PRAGUE---**

Matej Pavlik was born to Czech parents, Matthias and Maria, in the village of Hrubá Vrbka, Moravia, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Czech Republic) on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1879. His family were Papists, and may have had some Rusyn ancestry. Matej went through primary school in Kromeriz and Olomouc, then entered the Roman Catholic seminary in Olomouc, Moravia in 1902. There he was ordained a Papist priest of the Latin rite. While in seminary, he was noted for taking a special interest in the lives of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, as well as the Orthodox Church. He also became an advocate for the use of Church Slavonic.

Following the end of World War One, Czechoslovakia was established as an independent country and the state enforced Papism of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (which caused the Martyrdom of St. Maksim Sandovich) was replaced with religious freedom. Fr. Matej, and many others, returned to their ancestral faith of Orthodoxy, which was being served in Czechoslovakia by the Serbian Orthodox Church – where he was received and ordained a priest.

Fr. Matej brought many people to Orthodoxy in Czechoslovakia, and took a special interest in serving the Rusyn people. He was well known for his humility and for giving alms to the people of Czechoslovakia after war ravaged the country. In 1921, the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church unanimously voted to elect Fr. Matej a Bishop.

Before he could be made a Bishop, he first had to receive tonsure in the Orthodox



Church, as his monastic orders by the Papists were not recognized. He took monastic vows and was tonsured with the name Gorazd, after St. Gorazd, who was the successor to Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Moravia. He was made an Archimandrite and on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1921, he was elected as the Bishop of Moravia and Silesia, being the first Orthodox Bishop in Moravia in almost 900 years. He was consecrated by Patriarch Dimitrije of Serbia, Met. Antony (Khrapovitsky), the first-hierarchy of the ROCOR, and Met. (St.) Dositej of Zagreb (who was later murdered by the Ustashe), and was enthroned as Bishop Gorazd II of Moravia and Silesia the following day.

On September 21<sup>st</sup> 1925, Bp. Gorazd II, along with Met. Gavriilo (Dozich, who later became Patriarch Gavriilo V) of Montenegro, Vladyka Josif of Bitola and Vladyka Emilijan of Timok transferred from Prague the coffin with the relics of Prince Bishop, St. Petar II (Petrovich-Njegosh) of Montenegro to a new chapel in Lovchen in Montenegro. The Bishops and Orthodox believers were stopped by a mob of Roman Catholics soon after leaving Prague, including Papist priests, who met them with clubs, and threw rocks at them. Vladyka Gorazd sustained minor injuries.

Patriarch Dimitrije of Serbia personally blessed Bp. Gorazd II in his endeavor to evangelize the Czechs and Rusyns. Over the next decade, Bp. Gorazd built eleven churches and two chapels. He personally translated dozens of books into the Czech language, and held the first Orthodox Church services in the Czech language. In 1931, due to how many people – especially from the Rusyn population, who Bp. Gorazd particularly cared for – converted to Orthodoxy, an Eparchy was created for Mukachevo and Preshov.

In 1938, the Germans invaded Czechoslovakia and partitioned it, Slovakia was turned into a puppet state of the German Reich, and Czechia (Bohemia and Moravia) was occupied by the Wehrmacht. The German authorities placed the Church in Moravia under control of the ROCOR, under Metropolitan Seraphim (Lade) of Berlin. Bp. Gorazd II went to Serbia in 1939 to submit a diocesan report, and asked for a canonical release, to avoid schism or scandals due to the decision of the German authorities.

In September 1941, the protector general of Moravia, Constantine von Neurath, was removed from his position for being “too soft” and replaced with Reinhard Heydrich, who was known as the “Hangman of Prague” due to his brutality. On May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Czech resistance members assassinated Heydrich. The two

assassins fled and hid in the crypt of the Cathedral of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Prague – without knowledge from the priests or wardens there, who tried to convince the assassins to leave the Church.

The Nazis found them on June 18<sup>th</sup>, and killed them in the Church crypt. Bp. Gorazd II had no knowledge of this, as he was in Berlin visiting Metropolitan Seraphim, and helped in the consecration of Bp. Filip. When he heard of these events, he was horriified. Soon after, the Germans started arresting Orthodox priests and laypeople en masse, believing them to have helped the assassins. Bp. Gorazd upon returning to Prague went to the German authorities and took responsibility for giving refuge to the assassins saying: “I am giving myself up to the authorities and am prepared to face any punishment, including death.”

The Germans took this as proof the Orthodox Church was part of a larger conspiracy against the Reich. Vladyka Gorazd was arrested on June 27<sup>th</sup>, and despite the promises of the officers he turned himself in to, they kept the two priests and a Church Warden from the cathedral of Sts. Methodius and Cyril in prison, Fr. Vlasov, Fr. Jan and the Church Warden Vladimir. In prison he was tortured, the Germans hoping to starve and beat him in order to extract confessions of clergy who were working against the Nazi regime. Bp. Gorazd refused to speak, hoping that only he would be condemned to death.

In prison, he was forcibly shaved and stripped of any episcopal dignity. On September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Bp. Gorazd II, Fr. Vlasov, Fr. Jan and Vladimir were shot at the Kobylisz shooting range. Following his execution, the Germans closed all Orthodox Churches in Bohemia and Moravia, and all the priests were sent to concentration camps in Germany.

Met. Seraphim was approached by members of the German Schutzstaffel, and told to sign a letter condemning Bp. Gorazd. Met. Seraphim refused to sign such a letter, and he himself was arrested by the Gestapo for refusing to sign. The Nazis also did many other murders of Orthodox Christians after the Martyrdom of St. Gorazd.

Across several villages, 550 Orthodox Christians were killed in Moravia. In particular, the massacre in the village of Lidice. The entire population was murdered. All 173 men were shot, 11 men who weren't from Lidice but visiting from other villages were also shot. Hundreds of women and children were taken and brought to concentration camps in Germany. Many of the women from Lidice

were forcibly married to German soldiers, and forced to leave their Orthodox faith under threat of death. Those who refused were brought to the Helmno death camp.

The Church in Moravia stayed closed until the end of the war, and unfortunately after WW2, the country of Czechoslovakia fell under the Soviet sphere of influence, and the churches were re-opened as part of the “Moscow Patriarchate.” The site of St. Gorazd's Martyrdom, the Kobylisz shooting range, has been turned into a shrine for him and those Martyred with him, as well for all the Orthodox victims of the Nazis in Moravia.

On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1961, the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church glorified St. Gorazd as a Martyr, the ROCOR added St. Gorazd to their Church Calendar the same year. His relics were interred in a Church named after him in Olomouc, in 1987. There is also a monastery in Hrubá Vrpka, his birthplace, named after him, built over where his family home stood.

The Church celebrates the memory of St. Gorazd, St. Vlasov, St. Jan and St. Vladimir and the other Orthodox Martyrs of Moravia on September 4<sup>th</sup> (August 22<sup>nd</sup> O.S). There exist many icons of St. Gorazd, as well as an Apolytikion and Kontakion to him.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF KOPAONIK---**

On October 11<sup>th</sup>, member of the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS under commander Artur Phelps launched an operation against the Chetniks in the Kopaonik region. By October 12<sup>th</sup>, they entered the village of Kriva Reka, and an order issued by Phelps was read to the population, that they and the village were to be destroyed, as they were considered “sympathizers” with the Chetniks.

The Wehrmacht and SS men burned down all the houses in the village, and took the people of the village and locked them in the Church, and then blew it up with explosives. 46 people, including women and children, and the parish priest, were killed in the explosion, and the Church was left destroyed.

The officer in charge of this massacre, Captain Kaaserer wrote that in the village of Kriva Reka, at least 300 were killed. Over the next eight days, an additional 390 were killed in the village of Goch. Many of the perpetrators of this crime were also present at the Kraljevo massacre. Heinrich Himmler, the commander and chief of the SS, was also present at this massacre.

In total, 690 people were killed by the Germans across October 12<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, and the massacre was praised by German Army command, and considered a “christening” for the newly formed 7<sup>th</sup> SS Division “Prinz Eugene” who would go on to commit many more massacres. The Germans burned the relics of the Martyrs, and the Communists destroyed the remains of the Church after the war.

### **---ST. VUKASHIN OF KLEPCI---**

Little is known about Vukashin Mandrapa's life before World War Two. What is known is that he was a farmer and a merchant, who was quite well off, and lived in the village of Klepci near Chapljina. By the time of the Second World War, he was middle aged, with grey hair. Him and his nephews, Chedo and Dobro, served as Readers in Church. The Mandrapa family were benefactors of the Church of the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel in Sarajevo, and his mother's maiden name may have been Toholj.

He often went to Sarajevo on business trips, and had relatives from the village of Lokve in Herzegovina. In late 1942, the Ustashe arrested all the inhabitants of the villages of Lokve and Klepci, it is unknown which village Vukashin was in, and his nephews Chedo and Dobro were also arrested.

The villagers from Lokve and Klepci were sent to the infamous Jasenovac camp. On one freezing night in January 1943, the Ustashe at Jasenovac decided to put 3,000 Serbs, mostly from the Klepci and Lokve villages, to death. The Serbs were brought out in light clothing or stripped naked. Four Ustashas, who were members of the “Crna Legija” (Black Legion, called thus for both their brutality and black uniforms), the Franciscan priest Pero Brzica, Ante Zrinushich, “Shipka” (real name unknown), and a lieutenant Josip Mile Friganovich, nicknamed “Zhila” decided to have a competition to see who could kill the most Serbs.

Friganovich led the competition having killed 1,100 Serbs with his “Srbosjek” in the hours leading into morning, while the others had only killed about 300-400 by their own hands. Friganovich reported that he felt a “religious ecstasy” while killing. During this massacre, he saw Vukashin Mandrapa, standing peacefully, he was struck by his calmness and this “ecstasy” disappeared, he couldn't even move for a few seconds.

Friganovich approached Vukashin, and asked about his life, and his family where

Vukashin calmly explained they had already been killed, moved by the calmness of Vukashin, he wanted to spare his life, and thus ordered him to shout: “Long live the Poglavnik, Ante Pavelich” so that he may be released. Vukashin looked at the knife in his hand and plainly said: “My child, do what thou must.”

Friganovich hesitated, and then cut off one of Vukashin's ears, and repeated his order for him, Vukashin once again responded: “My child, do what thou must”, and he cut off his other ear, his nose and slashed at his face. Friganovich was more and more distraught and was pleading with Vukashin to shout praises to Pavelich so he could let him go, and once again Vukashin replied: “My child, do what thou must.”

Vukashin made the sign of the Cross after this, which distracted Friganovich, in his distraught and panicked state, he finally slit Vukashin's throat. After this act, his bloodlust faded, and he was mentally tormented. He could no longer kill or bare the sight of blood. In the end, the Franciscan priest Pero Brzca won the competition by killing 1,350 Serbs with his own hand.

In the days following the Martyrdom of St. Vukashin, Friganovich was reminded constantly with the words; “My child, do what thou must” and was eventually discharged from the Black Legion. He took on drinking, and became an alcoholic in an attempt to drown the voice out, but this did not stop the voice and nightmares from tormenting him. He would often attack random people, hoping it would stop the voice and nightmares of St. Vukashin, to no avail.

Sometime after the war, he was admitted into a mental hospital, and one of the doctors who saw him, Dr. Nede Zec (an ethnic Croatian who was a prisoner at Jasenovac), was told this testimony by Friganovich himself. Dr. Nede Zec recounted this in a letter in 1970.

The relics of St. Vukashin, and the other Martyrs who were killed on the same night, including his nephews Chedo and Dobro, were buried in a mass grave. Their relics have never been positively identified. Josip Friganovich spent the rest of his life in an asylum, and his date of death is unknown. The Church celebrates the memory of St. Vukashin on May 29<sup>th</sup> (the day of his Slava). On icons of St. Vukashin, he is portrayed in Serbian national costume.

---NEW MARTYRS OF BAGDALA---

Between the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September, 1941 and the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 1944, several executions were carried on Mount Bagdala, near Krushevac, by the Germans and collaborationist Albanian forces. Of the 1,642 people killed by the Germans, a majority of the executions were carried out between February and November of 1943, with most being in June and July of 1943.

The execution orders, mostly done against civilians who were suspected members of the Chetniks, were signed by SS General August Meissener, who wrote in the orders of his personal investment in the execution. Those who were killed were buried in mass graves around Mount Bagdala. Most of the collaborationist forces were ethnic Albanian Muslims, called by the Germans “Arnauts”; who were noted as being particularly cruel.

One of the largest massacres happened on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1943, only a day after the Vivodian celebration (the Martyrdom of Prince Lazar on the Kosovo Fields), an important holiday for the Serbian people. The executions were done by firing squads, in retaliation for an attack on German soldiers in Kraljevo. All the people killed – 530 men in total – were civilians from local villages. The following month, another 550 men who killed on Mount Bagdala.

Muslim Turks from Bulgaria also participated in the massacres. Romani Gypsies and Communists were also buried at this site, however most of them were killed at the penitentiary in Krushevac. After the war, the Communists built a memorial over the site and called it “Slobodishte” which still stands today. There is unfortunately no Orthodox memorial or listing of the Orthodox faithful who were Martyred on Mount Bagdala today.

The Communist authorities did destroy many of the relics of the Orthodox faithful murdered on Mount Bagdala. There were very few survivors from the massacres, and many who escaped were later hunted down by the German Wehrmacht or by the Communist authorities after the war.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF PIVA---**

During the months of May and June of 1943, the German SS launched an operation against the Communists called “Operation Schwartz” across Bosnia and Montenegro. The German units involved were the 7<sup>th</sup> SS Mountain Volunteer Division “Prinz Eugene” and the Bosniak Muslim Volunteer Unit, the 13th Waffen Division “Handschar” as well as Muslim battalions of the Ustasha

Domobran.

Across the operation, they began to target civilians, and destroyed the villages of Dub, Bukovac, Miljkovac, Duba and Rudinci in Bosnia. By June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1943, they reached the Piva region and the village of Doli Pivski in Montenegro. The Muslims were responsible for killing most of the inhabitants, which they did by burning Serbs alive inside their homes. The first man the Muslims killed was Obren Gojkovich, an elderly man, and they murdered 60 other Serbs on the same night.

In the early morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> of June, they murdered Fr. Jovan, the village priest, along with his children and grandchildren, by burning them alive inside their home. Inside another home, Krsto Adzhich and his wife Stoja, and three of their eight children, two year old Dushan, two year old Momchilo and eight year old Milorad were burnt alive.

One of their daughters, the seventeen year old Jaglika Adzhich, had hid in the nearby forest when the massacre started, however upon seeing her family home being burned, she ran to join her family, as to inherit a crown of Martyrdom for herself. The German soldiers at first tried to stop her, seeing her beauty and attempting to persuade her to save her life, but she insisted on joining her family, and was killed with them.

According to the few survivors from Doli Pivski, the Muslims burned the children first so that their parents and elderly were forced to watch. Victims were also thrown in pits around Piva, in one pit alone, 107 children and a mother in labour were thrown in and killed.

In the village of Doli Pivski alone, over the course of six days, 522 people were murdered, including 109 children. Across the region of Piva, 1,260 Serbs were killed between June 6<sup>th</sup> and June 12<sup>th</sup> 1943. The village of Doli Pivski was left completely destroyed, and entire families killed.

The Church that was destroyed and where St. Jovan served, dedicated to the beheading of St. John the Forerunner, was rebuilt in 2004, in a similar style to the Cathedral in Lovchen.

The site of the Adzhich home where St. Jaglika and her family were Martyred was marked with a plaque and Orthodox Cross. The area of Piva was resettled in the

1970s and renamed Pluzhine. A kindergarten in Pluzhine is named after St. Jaglika of Piva. A street in the Montenegrin capital of Podgorica is also named after St. Jaglika.

The Church celebrates the memory of the New Martyrs of Piva on June 7<sup>th</sup>. Icons of St. Jaglika, St. Jovan and other Martyrs of Piva exist, including painted frescos in the Church of the Resurrection in Podgorica, Montenegro.

### **---ST. DOSITEJ OF ZAGREB---**

Dragutin Vasich was born on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1887 in Belgrade. The name of his parents is not known. He went through primary school in Belgrade and attended seminary, before completing his courses in seminary, he took monastic vows and was tonsured a monk with the name Dositej in 1898, and upon his graduation in 1899, ordained a Hierodeacon.

In 1900, he attracted the attention of Metropolitan Mikhail of Kyiv, and was given a scholarship to study at the Kyiv Theological Seminary (that was founded by St. Petro Mohyla), and after four years obtained his master's degree in Theology. In 1904, he traveled to Berlin to study Protestant theology for two years, and in 1907 he traveled to Leipzig to study secular philosophy.

Upon his return to Serbia in 1908, he became a teacher at the Seminary in Belgrade. He held this job until 1909, where he then traveled to France to study psychology and later continued his studies in Geneva. Throughout his extensive travels, he became fluent in German, French, Czech and Russian.

He returned to Serbia in 1912, and the following year, on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1913, the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church elected him as Bishop of Nish, despite him still being a Hierodeacon. He ordained to the Priesthood then consecrated as a Bishop.

During the First World War in 1914, he did not want to leave Nish, but stayed with his people. By 1915, the Bulgarians had occupied Nish. Bishop Dositej welcomed the Bulgarians and told people to be obedient to the authorities and not to fret. Despite his humble demeanor, the Bulgarians arrested him at his residence, and kept him as a prisoner of war.

The Bulgarians – despite being Orthodox – were ordered by the Austrians; their



allies in the war, to arrest Orthodox clergy. Over 150 priests were arrested or killed by the Bulgarians from 1915-1918. Bishop Dositej was held in an internment camp in Bulgaria, and lived in brutal conditions. In 1918, Bulgaria surrendered and Bishop Dositej was released and returned to Nish.

He was transferred that same year to the Diocese of Transcarpathia, and helped bring many Rusyns in the now liberated Ukrainian lands to Orthodoxy. In 1919, he traveled to Constantinople in an attempt to help define the borders of the Serbian Orthodox Church within the bounds of the newly created Kingdom of Yugoslavia, he returned to Constantinople in 1920 to secure a blessing for the re-establishment of the Serbian Patriarchate.

Between 1919 and 1922, Bishop Dositej was in Czechoslovakia, helping rebuild the Orthodox Church among the Rusyn people there. However due to civil war and violence from the Roman Catholics, he was forced to return to Serbia and operate his diocese in exile. In 1921, he helped consecrate Bishop Gorazd II of Moravia to serve Orthodox Christians in Czechoslovakia.

Between 1922 and 1932, he funded the construction of many Churches, funded translation work for books into the Rusyn language, and organized a youth organization. For his missionary work, and for his suffering during the First World War, the King of Yugoslavia awarded him with the Order of St. Sava in the 1<sup>st</sup> degree with ribbon, the (St.) Milosh Obilich Medal for Bravery, the Order of Karadjordje's Star, 4<sup>th</sup> degree, and Order of the White Eagle in the 4<sup>th</sup> degree. Members of the Russian White Army and the ROCOR presented him with the Order of the Red Cross (both the Russian and Yugoslav variants) in Sremski Karlovci in 1930.

In 1932, the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church elected him as Metropolitan of the newly re-established Diocese of Zagreb. There he became distinguished for his organization and missionary efforts in the city of Zagreb. He helped make the city of Zagreb an important spiritual center for Orthodox Christians in Yugoslavia.

At the outbreak of World War Two, Metropolitan Dositej found himself at his residence in Zagreb. On April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the same day the "Independent State of Croatia" was proclaimed, he was arrested along with his Archdeacon, Fr. Lazar Zhivadinovich. They were both brought to the prison on Petrinjska Street, and placed in cell number eight.

Vladyka Dositej and Fr. Lazar were held in this prison for almost a year. In late 1941, the Belgian consul Arnold Roberts visited Zagreb. He was taken for a tour to Petrinjska prison, and upon looking into cell eight, he saw Metropolitan Dositej, whose face had been disfigured from torture. Upon learning that he was an Orthodox Bishop, he said: “By God, what savagery are these people (the Ustashe) doing?”

By February 1942 he fell ill due to the torture and damp conditions in the Petrinjska prison. Seriously ill and on the brink of death, he was transferred to a hospital in Zagreb run by the Roman Catholic “Sisters of Mercy” – a Roman Catholic monastic order for women. There, the Papist nuns tortured and humiliated him daily, among these horrific tortures done by the “Sisters of Mercy”; they tore out his beard and castrated him.

In September 1944, after years of pleading for his release, General Milan Nedich – who was the prime minister of the collaborationist Serbian “Government of National Salvation” – had finally secured his, Vladyka Nikolaj of Mostar and Vladyka Tomas of Zvornik's release. The Ustashe police chief in Zagreb, Bozihar Cerovski, testified: “The Metropolitan was so terribly exhausted and tortured that he couldn't walk. He had to be crammed into a freight card and sent to Belgrade, barely clinging to life.”

The three Bishops were sent to Zemun in a freight car. German soldiers took the weak Metropolitan Dositej to Belgrade, where attempts were made to nurse him back to health, however the tortures he endured proved impossible to treat. He was brought to the Vavedenje Monastery outside of Belgrade, and fell asleep on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1945. General Milan Nedich, went to his funeral.

He was buried in the Vavedenje Monastery cemetery among other Bishops and clergy, on his tombstone is inscribed a verse from the Book of Job, Chapter 2, verses 2-3. He was the last Bishop to be killed by the Ustashe. In 2008, his relics were found to be incorrupt, and were transferred from the cemetery to a reliquary inside the Church dedicated to the Presentation of the Theotokos at the Vavedenje Monastery. A proto-icon in the form of a fresco was painted above his reliquary.

Due to his missionary activity in Transcarpathia, he is particularly venerated by the Rusyn people, and sometimes called “St. Dositej of Transcarpathia.” The Church celebrates his memory on January 13<sup>th</sup> (December 31<sup>st</sup> O.S.).

## **---NEW MARTYRS OF SARAJEVO---**

In February 1945, as the NDH was collapsing and the Communists were quickly capturing all of Yugoslavia, Ante Pavelich sent Vjekoslav Luburich – who was in charge of many of the concentration camps in the NDH and the leader of the “Crusader” youth organization – to Sarajevo in Bosnia. He was sent to Sarajevo under the pretext of destroying Communist resistance, as to slow down the Soviet advance into Bosnia.

The real objective of Luburich was to create a secret police and cause as much terror and fear among the Serbian population, so as to allow the Ustashe to retreat with little delay or casualties. From his own testimony, Luburich wanted to recruit “sadists.” The men for Luburich's police force were ethnic Croats recruited from the jails, prisons and mental hospitals in Sarajevo

Luburich established his headquarters in a building on Sokolska street (later renamed Mis Irbina street after the war). Only a few weeks later it was transferred to a building on 49 Skenderija street that was known as “Villa Folkert” owned by a Mr. Berkovich. It was a large building and also happened to be the seat of the Masonic lodge in Sarajevo. Luburich chose this building, and left the Masonic imagery on the facade for symbolic reasons.

The Ustashe secret police also used a home and attached restaurant owned by the Babunovich family called “Gradski podrum” on 18 Skenderija street, which was given the nickname by the Serbs of Sarajevo; “the House of Terror.” The Masonic lodge was used as a court room, where thousands of Serbs and Jews were rounded up and sentenced to death. The large building had many rooms, which were converted into makeshift prison cells.

The executions would be carried out at the “House of Terror” which was described by Luburich himself as resembling a “slaughterhouse.” Just from the 24<sup>th</sup> of February to the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, hundreds were arrested and placed in “emergency court” sessions. On one day alone in February, 13 separate trials had sentenced 85 people – 44 to death and the rest to long term imprisonment – those who were given prison sentences were tortured and later killed.

Those sentenced to death would be brought to the House of Terror, where they would be brutally tortured, with their lives being ended eventually by having their throats slit. Between late March and early April 1945, Luburich recorded that 323

people had been killed, including 55 men who were publicly hanged in the suburb of Marijin Dvor. The men who were hanged had placards placed around their necks that said “Long live the Poglavnik.”

An American journalist who was there when Sarajevo was captured by the Communists on April 7<sup>th</sup> described the scene: “(I saw) bodies stacked like cordwood on top of one another. We were told these were Serbs whom the the Ustasas had hanged by barbed wire from lampposts in Sarajevo... Luburich's brief reign of terror constituted the Ustashe's final gruesome legacy in Sarajevo. As sadistic acts were being carried out, Sarajevo's destiny was being decided outside the city in the fields and hills of battle...”

Vjekoslav Luburich fled the city shortly before its capture by the Communists. And despite the NDH collapsing in early May 1945, Luburich and many Ustasha loyalists continued their campaign against the Serbs as a guerrilla unit, calling themselves “Crusaders” and would continue to murder Orthodox Christians well into the early months of 1946.

The number of victims killed by Luburich's forces in Sarajevo between February and April 1945 are unknown, with the number being in the thousands. The Communist authorities destroyed the restaurant “Gradski podrum” and built a theater over the site; according to Communist authorities, in order to promote “brotherhood and unity.”

The former Masonic lodge and “court house” was destroyed by the Communists in the 1970s – despite objections from local Serbs, who had turned it into a museum memorializing the atrocities of the Ustashe – and turned into a kindergarten. In 1992, memorial plaques were placed at both sites.

### **---ST. MOMCHILLO GRGUREVICH---**

Momchilo Grguervich was born in 1906 in the village of Focha, in Bosnia (today in the Republika Srpska). He attended seminary in Sarajevo and graduated with a Master's degree in Theology in 1928. In early 1929, he was married and was ordained a Deacon, and later that same year, ordained to the Priesthood. He served at the parish in the village of Chelebichi, in the Metropolis of Dabar-Bosna, until his Martyrdom.

Out the outbreak of World War Two, the Ustashe repeatedly planned his arrest and

execution, but due to the grace of God, he avoided all of these attempts by the Ustashe. Despite the end of the war in May 1945 and the takeover of the Communists, many Croats and Muslims still carried out attacks against the Serbs. Many of these men were under the command of Vjekoslav Luburich, who carried out a guerilla campaign against the Serbian population.

On the night of November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1945, three men broke into the home of Fr. Momchilo and began to attack him. He fled his home and ran into the forest nearby, there the three men chased him and eventually wounded him by stabbing him. While he was still alive, they tortured him and cut off his fingers and slashed his arms and body. The three Ustasas then killed him by beheading him with a hacksaw, and took his head as a trophy, which they later threw into a municipal building in Chelebichi.

The three men responsible for the murder of St. Momchilo were later captured by the Communist authorities, and were found to be Muslim Ustasas. They also told the authorities where the rest of St. Momchilo's relics were, which the Communists unceremoniously buried in a secular graveyard. Due to the antireligious campaign of the Communists, the attempts of the Serbian Orthodox Church to transfer the relics of St. Momchilo and honorably bury them were repeatedly denied.

In 1990, St. Momchilo's son, Vasilije, had finally gotten a permit from the state to transfer his father's relics. They were transferred and given an Orthodox funeral service in the cemetery adjacent to the Church in Chelebichi, dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel, where St. Momchilo served for 14 years. St. Momchilo was the last Orthodox clergymen to be killed by the Ustashe.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF DANICA AND JADOVNO---**

The Independent State of Croatia was the only collaborationist state of the Axis Powers that ran its own concentration camps without help from the Germans. The first of 26 camps, Danica, was founded on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1941, only 10 days after the creation of the NDH. The camp was founded in an abandoned fertilizer factory near Koprivnica, and ran by Mijo Babich, a deputy of Ante Pavelich, who also went by the nickname "Giovanni."

The Danica camp was run until April of 1945, but most inmates after May of 1941 were transferred to other camps such as the nearby Jadovno camp. In April of

1941, within the first week of the camp's foundation, 400 inmates were brought there. By June of 1941, the number had already risen to 2,000.

Most of the inmates were killed in 1941, with about 5,000 being killed, most of whom were Serbian civilians. The bodies of the victims were brought to Jadovno and tossed into the ravines in the vicinity of the camp. Jadovno camp was an extension of the Danica operation. It is unclear when it was founded, however it was within a few weeks of Danica's foundation.

The camp was 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the village of Gospich. The location was chosen due to the many ravines on the foot of Mount Velebit, with the camp being considered a “way station” for these pits. The executions would occur by the Ustashe throwing Serbs down into these pits. Oftentimes the Ustashe would throw hand grenades or rocks into these pits as well. Survivors of the camps note that “special prisoners” would be shot and fed to the guard dogs the Ustashe kept.

In June of 1941, Vjekoslav Luburich visited the camp, and opened his visit by murdering a two year old child by slitting his throat with a knife, and ordering one of the Ustashe to crush the skull of another child with his boot. An Italian medical team visited the camp in September of 1941, and Dr. Vittori Finderle wrote:

“...in the area around the pits I found pieces of chain, padlocks of various shapes and sizes, railway employee badges, ribbons from uniforms of officers, toothbrushes, pocket mirrors, combs, and very interestingly, emptied and torn wallets. On one spot I found pieces of a skull which I believe belong to a man aged between 30 and 50, killed two months prior. The opening of the pit was eight by five meters in size, and is very deep. A rock I threw in did not echo, I could not hear it when it hit the bottom. The rim of the pit was covered in lime that seemed to be only a few days old. Despite this, the whole area is covered in the smell of decomposing bodies. I estimate about 500 victims were thrown into this pit.”

The Ustashe killed thousands at the pits around Jadovno. In September, the executions stopped and prisoners were transferred to Pag island. They used lime and other chemicals in an attempt to destroy the evidence. In one pit alone, “Jama Plochama”, 2,000 bodies were found. The total number of victims murdered by the Ustashe is believed to be over 68,000.

**---ST. DAMJAN OF GRAHOVO---**

Damjan Shtrbac was born in Plavno near Knin, on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1912. He attended seminary in Cetinije and graduated in 1932. He was ordained a Deacon on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March and a priest the following day in Shibenik. He was transferred to the parish church in Zhegar and eventually to Bosansko Grahovo, where he was when the Second World War began.

At first, the Italian Army occupied Grahovo and the area around Knin, but at the end of May of 1941, the Italian Army withdrew from Grahovo, and the Ustashe quickly took control of the area. On June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1941, an order was given by the local Ustashe commander to arrest all Serbs from the surrounding area. Fr. Damjan was one of the people arrested. He was held in the prison in the court house of Bosansko Grahovo for 20 days, and then transferred to the prison at Knin.

Eventually he was brought to the Jadovno camp, and was given the inmate number 577. On the morning of July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1941, he was taken along with hundreds of other Serbs and brought to the pits. The Ustashas skinned him while he was still alive, and then threw him into one of the many pits around Jadovno. His memory is kept by the Orthodox Church on May 31<sup>st</sup>, the day of his Slava.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF PAG---**

In June of 1941, Mijo Babich visited the island of Pag, off the coast of Croatia, and due to its remote location, thought it was satisfactory for executions of the Ustashe regime. A camp was established on the island and named Slana, and soon after a prison at Metanja for women and children was established on the island. The Slana concentration camp was part of the Danica-Jadovno system.

Ivan Devchevich was placed as the commander of the Slana concentration camp. The 13<sup>th</sup> Ustasha battalion was stationed on the island of Pag. The initial efforts of the Ustashe to establish the Slana concentration camp were aided by the Roman Catholic bishop of Pag, Joso Felicovich. Within the first few weeks, most prisoners died from torture, exhaustion, heat stroke, hunger and thirst. The wife of a local fisherman – whose boat was being used to transport prisoners to Pag – noted after the war, that her husband's boat had been used to transport 3,000 prisoners alone. The camp became overfilled, and the Ustashe began mass shootings of prisoners.

Joso Felicovich wrote that in his first visit to the Slana concentration camp, he

saw a “piece of cardboard on the wall of the Ustashe barracks... with the names of women and girl from the camp that would be brought in to be deflowered...” An Italian medical team visited the camp in September of 1941 and discovered a mass grave at Metanja with the bodies of 791 women and children. The report mentioned the youngest body found was of a five month old infant, and they also reported the following:

“...after the first five to twenty centimeters (of earth) were removed, we saw many hands, often bound, bare feet, sometimes with shoes, heads looking upwards or exposed or necks exposed... Although we had already gotten used to seeing limbs and heads sticking out, there was something in particular about the way they had been buried... The proof that they had been buried mortally wounded but still alive, distorted and terrible facial expressions on most of the bodies... In some places, there were corpses stacked five layers high, sometimes less... We found machine gun shells, near the pits, and on many bodies we could see mortal wounds made with knives on chests, backs and necks. One young woman had her breasts completely cut off with a sharp object.”

The same Italian medical team interviewed their guide, who also reported many inmates from Slana had been thrown into the sea tied to large rocks. According to both the Italian medical team and the Papist bishop Joso Felicovich, about 12,000 people had been killed at Slana on Pag Island.

Soon after the report by the Italians, the Italian Military shut down the camp at Pag Island in November of 1941, fearing that the brutality of the Ustashe would lead to a revolt. The Communists used Pag Island for many of their executions after the war. In 1975, a plaque was placed to commemorate the victims of the Ustashe on Pag Island, which has been vandalized several times by Croatian nationalists since 1995.

### **---NEW MARTYRS OF STARA GRADISHKA---**

In August of 1941, the Stara Gradishka camp was founded as a concentration camp for women and children. The commander of the camp was the Ustashe Sergeant Ante Vrban, who arrested most of the local Serbian populace from the region of Kozara. The guards and staff of the Stara Gradishka camp was made up of Franciscan monks and Roman Catholic nuns.

The camp had multiple units, at the “Kula” unit, women who were sick and



weaker children would be left to starve to death. At the “Gargo hotel” prisoners would be tortured in a cellar. “Gargo hotel” was run by Ustasha Nikola Gargo. At the “Economy” unit, which was a converted horse stable, prisoners would be gassed using sulphur dioxide gas.

Most prisoners were killed at the main tower, which was the office of Ante Vrban. The tower was nicknamed “the Tower of Terror” by many survivors. In June 1942, more than 2,000 people were thrown off this tower and killed. Ante Vrban also admitted he personally oversaw the execution of 400-600 children in the tower. Poison gas would also be used at the tower. Witness Jordana Friedlander, a Roman Catholic nun and guard at the camp wrote:

“...at that time, fresh women and children came to daily to the camp at Stara Gradishka. About fourteen days later, Commander Vrban ordered all children to be separated from their mothers and be put into one room. Ten of us were told to carry blankets. The children crawled about the room, and one child put their arm and leg through the doorway, so it could not be closed. Vrban shouted: 'Push it!', When I did not do that, he banged the door and crushed the child's leg. He then took the child by its leg, and ran it on the wall until it was dead. After that, we continued to carry the children in. When the room was full, Vrban brought poison gas and killed them all.”

The murder of children was explained by Minister of the Interior of the NDH, Andrija Artukovich as being “most important”, and described Serbs as being “seeds of beasts”, and said the extermination of Serbian children needed to be done in “timely fashion”. The head of the women guards and staff at the camp was Nada Luburich, the sister of Vjekoslav Luburich.

One witness, Iko Senjanovich recalled the “Kula” unit, how people would be locked in the unit for days without food and water: “People were slowly dying. It was horrible to hear them cry for help.” Another witness, Cadik Danon reported: “...once we spread our blankets and laid down to rest. Around noon they drove us into the yard and distributed cattle feed with water with salt or grease mixed in; everything was the same as it was in Jasenovac. Immediately after dinner, they thrust us into the dungeon and locked us in.”

Andrija Artukovich personally ordered caustic soda to be added to the food, to slowly poison the prisoners. After Friar Miroslav Filipovich was transferred to the camp, he became well known for his cruelty, often killing women and children

with his bare hands. On the night of the 29<sup>th</sup> of August, 1942, a contest was held to see who could kill the most inmates. Petar Brzica, one of the guards, murdered 1,360 people with a butcher's knife. He was rewarded with a golden watch, a silver medal, a roasted pig, and wine for winning the contest.

The Roman Catholic nuns often were involved in the torture and executions. From 1942 onward, many survivors and guards said Ante Vrbanić became “obsessed” with poison gas. After studying a Soviet gas chamber van, he built one. Dinko Šakich – who was the brother-in-law of Vjekoslav Luburić – had operated the gas van at the camp.

A witness to the event, Dragutin Rožić, one of the few Serbian men to be housed at the camp testified: “(Šakich) directed his guards to pack women and children into the vans, and fit a rubber hose from the exhaust to the interior, and drive around and around the camp until the passengers were dead... they killed at least half of a group that had arrived this way.”

In early April 1945, as it was becoming clear the NDH was falling apart and being invaded by the Communists, they began clearing the camp, doing mass executions of prisoners and transferring others to Lepoglava, and there to Jasenovac, where they were killed. According to a survivor by the name of Shimo Klaić, Dinko Šakich described the grouping of prisoners at Lepoglava to be “...a collection of evil... All the world's filth from Stara Gradiška and Jasenovac are collected here.” Klaić survived by fleeing as the train car he and other prisoners were carried on was set on fire. Šakich was captured by the Communists in Lepoglava and killed.

The camp was completely abandoned by late April 1945. The Communists had used the facilities at Stara Gradiška as a prison camp for political dissidents, the Communists continued to run the site until 1980. During the Croatian war of independence, various factions fought over the site, which left it damaged. To this day, the Croatian government has placed no memorial for the Serbian victims. The Roman Catholic church, has placed a memorial for their nuns – who participated in the murder of Serbs – who died there after a Typhoid outbreak in 1943.

Over the four years of its operation, 12,790 people were murdered at the camp, an overwhelming majority of which were Serbian women and children. Most executions were done prior to 1943, when the camp was “turned around” due to a visit by a medical team of the Red Cross, which visited the camp several more times until June 1944.

### ---NEW MARTYRS OF JASENOVAC---

The most infamous and well known of all the camps run by the Ustashe was the Jasenovac Concentration Camp. The complex containing multiple camps was built between August 1941 and May of 1942. The two previous camps on the site, called “Krapje” (Jasenovac I) and “Brochice” (Jasenovac II) were the first built, and closed down in November once “Ciglana” (Jasenovac III) and “Kozara” (Jasenovac IV) were completed. All of the camps were near a small bank on the delta of the Sava and Una rivers, near a village named Jasenovac, inhabited by Croats.

Ante Pavelich personally ordered the creation of Jasenovac, and created a government department, the “Ustashe Supervisory Service” (Ustashka Nadzoma Sluzbha) or “UNS” to oversee the camp. Among the officers of the UNS included Vjekoslav Luburich, Ljubo Milosh, and the Franciscan priest Miroslav Filipovich. Ivica Matkovich, Ante Vrbanić and Dinko Šakich were also given government positions in the UNS.

Most Serbs interred at Jasenovac were from the Kozara region. The Ustashe put posters in the region months prior to the mass arrests threatening that if the Serbs would not convert to Catholicism, they would be deported to concentration camps. Women and children were sent to Stara Gradishka, whereas men were sent to Jasenovac.

The Red Cross visited Jasenovac in February 1942, where the conditions were improved during their visit, but quickly reverted after the medical team left. Forced labour, starvation, squalid conditions, and torture were all common. Executions were carried out as “public performances.” Inmates were forbidden to write – for fear the Ustashe's crimes would become well known – and executed if they were found in possession of stationery.

The food at Jasenovac was often “soup” made up of hot water and starch, served twice a day. In January of 1943, it was changed to a single serving of “turnip soup”, hot water with three or four cabbage leaves for the entire population once a day, with each inmate getting about half a liter of “soup.” For Orthodox holidays, the Ustashe mockingly would throw a “special feast” and give the Serbian prisoners a dead dog to eat. Many inmates resorted to eating grass and leaves to survive.

Outbreaks of typhoid fever, malaria, dysentery and other diseases were common. Sick inmates would be sent to the “clinic” at Jasenovac IV, where they would be executed or left to die. Disease spread due to the lack of latrines, with only large pits being dug, where the Ustashe guards often threw prisoners in the pits to drown them.

At Jasenovac, the practice of using sheat knives, nicknamed “Serb cutters” (Srbosjek) by the Ustashe, became common. At the kiln, where bricks were made by forced labour, the Ustashe engineer in charge, Dominik Pichili, would often throw prisoners inside the brick-making furnaces. Over the course of 1942, the Jasenovac camp kept expanding, with more and more sites and areas being added, including in the nearby village of Gradina Donja and Ushtica.

Vjekoslav Luburich at a banquet on October 9<sup>th</sup> 1942, boasted of the efficiency of the camp, stating: “We have slaughtered here at Jasenovac more Serbs than the Ottoman Empire was able to do during their occupation...”

By June 1944, the Ustashe became more aware they needed to destroy the evidence and hide their crimes at Jasenovac. Ljubo Milosh was in charge of depositing the bodies from the many mass graves around Jasenovac, which would be done by burning or with the use of chemicals.

By April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945, there were about 3,500 prisoners at Jasenovac, Vjekoslav Luburich, brought an additional 1,590 prisoners there after the Lepoglava prison was evacuated. Between April 7<sup>th</sup>, and April 21<sup>st</sup>, the Ustashe murdered the last prisoners, and set the buildings on fire or blew them up with dynamite.

Jasenovac was the single deadliest camp in all of the NDH, with over 100,000 people being killed there between 1941 and 1945, and overwhelming majority of which were Serbs. The Communists after the war put a memorial to Partisan fighters, but not for the Serbian civilians who were killed at Jasenovac. A memorial for the civilians killed at Jasenovac was only placed in 1990.

A Serbian Orthodox Church dedicated to the Nativity of St. John the Forerunner built in 1775 was near the Jasenovac camp, and was destroyed by the Ustashe during the concentration camp's construction in 1941. In 1984 it was rebuilt as a monastery. In 1995, it was destroyed by the Croatian military during “Operation Flash.” In 2000, it was restored and re-dedicated to the New Martyrs of Jasenovac,

a proto-icon of the New Martyrs of Jasenovac was painted in the Church in 2001. Another icon of the New Martyrs of Jasenovac exists at the cathedral of St. Sava in Belgrade.

A secular museum also exists at the site where the Jasenovac III and IV camps were, highlighting the horrors of the camp. Today in Croatia, there exists much historical revisionism and denial of the crimes of the Ustashe – in particular with Jasenovac – by many nationalists, including the first president of the Republic of Croatia, Franco Tudjman. In 2020, a book was published praising Vjekoslav Luburich as a “knight of Croatia” which was promoted by the Roman Catholic church in Croatia.

The feast of the New Martyrs of Jasenovac, and all the New Martyrs of Serbia under the Ustashe, is celebrated on August 31<sup>st</sup> (O.S.). The Feast was first celebrated at the monastery of Novo Grachania in Illinois, USA, by the Free Serbian Orthodox Church. The New Martyrs of Serbia were added to the calendar by St. Nikolaj Velimirovich shortly before his repose in 1956.

May all the New Martyrs of the Serbian land, murdered by the Ustashe and crusaders, pray to God for us!

## **---APPENDIX---**

### **Matushka Maria Shishkova's account**

Recorded by Sava Beljovich

“When I and my godfather, Reader Thaddeus visited Archbishop Andrei (Maklakov) of Rockland in New Jersey, in 2023, I had the chance to speak to Matushka Maria (Shishkova), who is the widow of the late Protopope Vladimir Shishkov, daughter of Vladyka Gregory Grabbe, as well as the sister of Vladyka Antony Grabbe and Matushka Anastasia, all of whom are of blessed memory.

She was born in Poland in 1929 but spent most of her childhood in Serbia. When I asked her about the terrible years between 1941 and 1945, she shared a single story with me, that I could tell was difficult for her to recall. She has given me permission to write this down, however.

I asked 'Matushka, can you tell me about the war?' at dinner. She spoke and said: 'when I was a young girl, 13 years old, I remember seeing a bride, bridegroom and a priest... They had their throats slit, and they were cast into the (Sava) river... The Ustashe had made sure the bride and bridegrooms hands were still holding. They did this often... every day you would see bodies in the river. People would go and get them out, and bury them, but there was not enough graves for them all.'

I could tell the emotion in her voice as she told this story. She also spoke about her father, Fr. George – who later became Bishop Gregory – along with her brother Dimitri, had gone to the Germans to plead for them to free many of the Serbian prisoners they held. She also spoke about her father was trying to help St. Nikolaj Velimirovich escape from Dachau in 1945.

The Russians of the ROCOR had to flee Serbia in 1944 when the Communists captured Belgrade, of which her family was one of many that fled. She is of the opinion, having been a personal witness of the genocide of the Serbs, that it is 'insane' that the Serbian Patriarchate or any of these 'world Orthodox' would want to unite with Rome or pray with the Roman Catholics...”